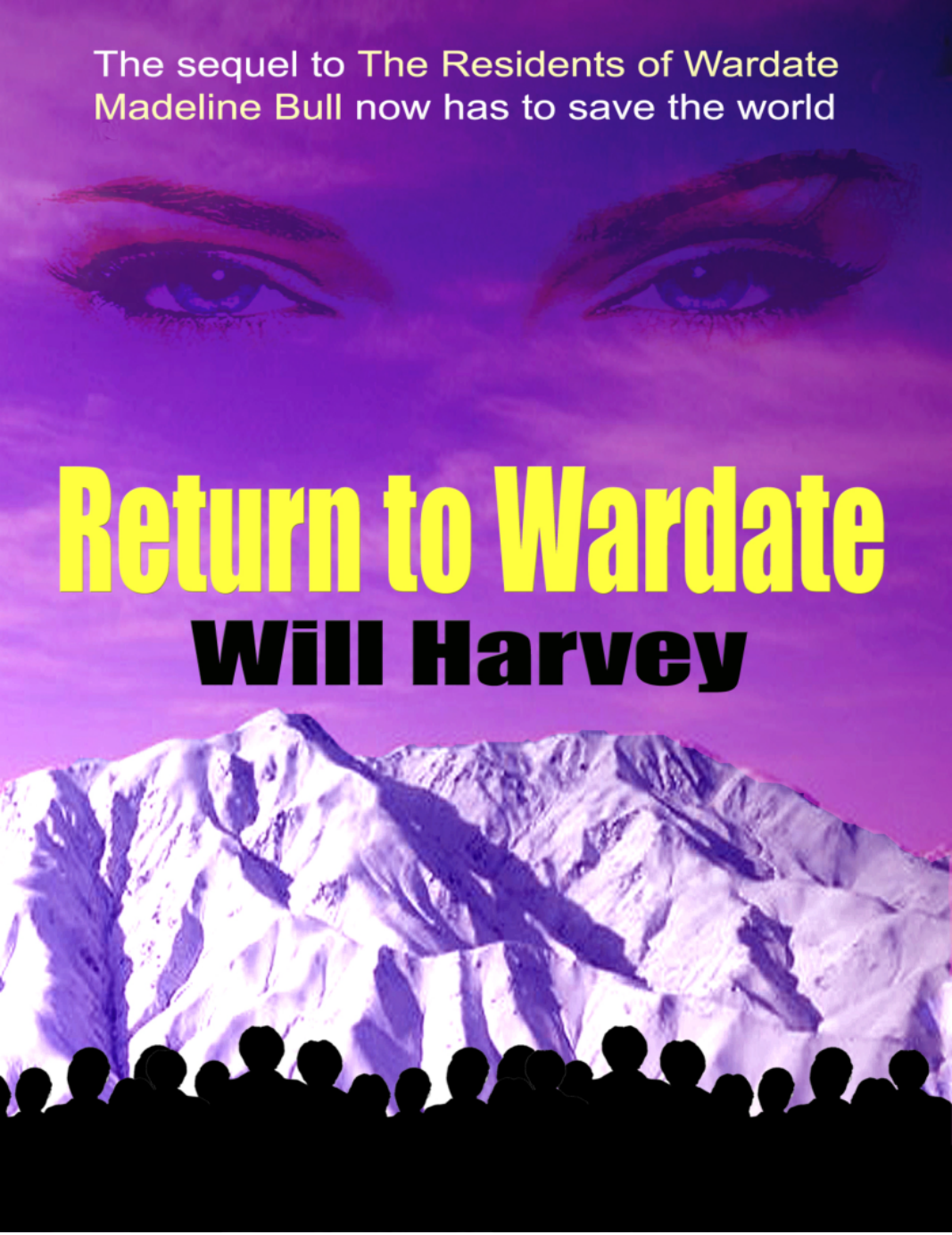
The sequel to The Residents of Wardate
Madeline Bull now has to save the world



Return to Wardate

Will Harvey

Copyright © 2022 Will Harvey

All rights reserved. This book or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the publisher or author except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

First Printing, 2018

www.billcornwell.co.uk
mail@billcornwell.co.uk

Contents

1. Miracle worker
2. An arrest is made
3. Two new recruits
4. Jenny has changed
5. A Polish interrogation
6. Infamous Madeline Bull
7. Shawlsdown Hall
8. The training
9. Back home
10. Bull sent down
11. An A23 battery
12. The ‘V’ room
13. Everyone loves Madeline
14. A drive to Digg
15. Coley, polite to the end
16. The hate begins
17. Adam on a garden seat
18. Nuttall’s Aston
19. A visit to Strangeways
20. A shop in Buxton
21. A useful phone app
22. Fast food now available
23. Parachute training
24. Extreme G
25. A lift to Washington
26. A splendid front lawn
27. Finding the President
28. Meeting the President
29. Bottom of the World
30. Darling Adam

31. Two at a time
32. Warhead on its way
33. A load of lies
34. A golden moment
35. A fake Irish accent
36. The Reds vs. the Yankees
37. On the move again
38. Even higher than Everest
39. A Honda generator
40. The operation
41. Passport control freak
42. Marmite on toast
43. A black menace
44. A special android
45. An off-the-shoulder number
46. Flying blind
47. Breaking the speed limit
48. Power sockets
49. The Reunion
50. Putting on a new face
51. Vital signs OK
52. Return to Digg
Other books by the Author:
The Author…

Return to Wardate

By Will Harvey

Strictly speaking, you don't have to read the first instalment **'The Residents of Wardate'** to get through this story but if you do, it will remove much of the confusion.

1. Miracle worker

The signals from his optic nerves bombarded his visual cortex like a meteor shower.

Adam would never forget, couldn't possibly forget the disturbing sight, but he would have to – if he ever wanted sweet dreams again.

'Barton, you have to help her!' Adam pleaded. 'You've got to!'

To recap, Adam had hastily removed the lid from the tank – the tank which cosseted the withered husk of Poppy Cock's severely burnt body. The last screw in the lid was a devil to get out but he wasn't going to let that minor hindrance get in the way of his objective. Poppy was inside; that much is true but her existence was measurably more spiritual than anything physical. Bathed in the special fluid was not the pretty Poppy as all used to see her but something that was once a human being. The spirit of Poppy was still beautiful and always would be but now everything rested on Barton performing a miracle – as simple as that.

Barton silently and stoically inspected the state of Poppy's unconscious body in the tank. The minimum amount of life support Aaron Alexander had left connected to the tank had completely melted away with the fire. Poppy was isolated, barely surviving on her own God-given live support – this was not good. With an aggressive

but focused action, Barton ripped the surviving tubes and connections from the new shiny tank and pushed and plugged them into the receptors of Poppy's battered tank. The new tank was intended for embittered Ronald Poultney but principally, it would be evil Aaron Alexander's gift to Wardate.

'That *should* keep her alive for now. Priority right now is to see my daughter, but I'll be back as soon as I can,' said Barton.

Adam knew this was an area where there could be no argument. Barton's daughter Lauren was now safe and being cared for in hospital after being chained up in a cold, damp, dark culvert for several awful weeks. Adam appreciated what he had done and remained silent. Barton left with one of the police officers. Detective Stoddard and Adam remained, standing silently in the damp dripping shell of the old cow shed full of charred technical wizardry. Several minutes went by before Stoddard asked a very pertinent question.

'Okay, what the hell is going on here?'

'Exactly, hell is going on here,' said Adam quietly.

He didn't particularly feel like talking civilly for the moment, especially to an aloof member of the police force. Stoddard gingerly slithered his way over to the tank.

'What… who… *is* that?'

'*That* is what's left of Poppy – Poppy Cock, my fiancée.'

'*No,* not the TV correspondent person, I thought she was dead?'

'Well, she will be very shortly if Barton can't work his miracles on her.'

'I'm sorry, excuse me for being a bit slow but what's Poppy Cock got to do with all this?'

Adam didn't know how to continue. Should he remain tight-lipped? Indeed, should he have gone as far as he had and told Stoddard that it was Poppy in the tank? Perhaps Stoddard ought to know – know the whole story that Madeline Bull was actually an android. This brought on another crucial question.

'Where's Madeline?' Adam asked suddenly.

'Officer Stevens took her into the house, apparently, she's fast asleep. Strange affliction, doesn't seem to want to wake up.'

'Stoddard, I know you have to take the moral high ground with your profession but… can you keep a secret, and I mean a big secret?'

‘Of course, provided it’s lawful,’ said Stoddard officiously.

‘The answer’s no then? This is way off being lawful.’

Withholding evidence now reverberated in the space between Adams' ears. He wished he’d just invented a few white lies and left it at that. Now there was no turning back. He had to tell Stoddard the whole incredible truth. Unfortunately, telling him would mean that there would be one more person in the world that was in on the tightly guarded secret. One more person could be accepted if they were above repute but even police Detectives have been known to have issues with their principles. Adam had noticed his cavalier attitude to crises and his apparent lack of intuition despite his many years of service. However, this didn’t mean to say he was untrustworthy or undependable. Now he had to know and that was that.

‘Okay, to put it simply, Madeline is an android.’ said Adam concisely.

‘Madeline… android? Well, that’s certainly different.’ said Stoddard.

‘See all these wires, this burnt-out equipment? Look… Poppy, she’s covered in little needles with wires attached to them. All this equipment relays the hundreds of signals from her body to that android, snoozing in the house. That melted monitor on the wall over there used to show Madeline’s eyesight. That box affair in front of Poppy’s face, it contains, amongst other things, video screens which relay exactly what Madeline’s eyes see. Getting it yet?’

‘So, you are saying Miss Bull is just a machine, made of metal and plastic?’

‘Well, perhaps materials not as mundane as that but yes, she is a machine. So, you believe me?’

‘Oh yes, and the little fairies at the bottom of my garden keep nicking my carrots.’ ridiculed Stoddard.

‘Look, I didn’t want to tell you but you did ask… Go and take a close look at Madeline.’ suggested Adam.

As a reminder; Poppy’s permanent home was this life support tank because twelve months ago, she was burnt terribly by the actions of an evil teenage boy – a resident of Wardate. This boy was now dead because an android had professionally, painfully and revengefully killed him. Now, this android had a secret which made it behave very human-like. The secret was precisely this: Poppy had been given a second chance: to live by remotely controlling an incredible android called Madeline Bull, from within her life support tank. Now though, Poppy couldn’t control anything, not even her breathing, heartbeat or respiration. This was because she had been literally poached in her tank by a fire, cruelly started by Aaron

Alexander. He was one of the four scientists who had previously helped to give her this new life but, as it turned out, ironically, he was an evil, resident of Wardate.

For a brief moment, just before Adam removed the lid from the tank, seconds passed as hours and hours passed as pure joy. In this serendipitous moment, everything: Madeline Bull, Wardate and the assassinations, all had been a dream and many parallels had been forged. For example, Wardate related to Ward 8 where she spent her time in hospital. For this brief joyous moment, she was well again, her burns had mended and she was back with her beloved Adam.

2. An arrest is made

Madeline Bull lay there, beautiful, oozing sex appeal, peacefully asleep on the lounge sofa. Her long thick blonde hair draped neatly around a small cushion that Stevens had thoughtfully placed under her head. She looked convincingly human, perfectly human, more human than many humans. Stoddard was going to take a lot of convincing.

'Miss Bull! Madeline, Madeline, wake up!' boomed Stoddard.

'Forget it, she can't wake up. This is how she, the machine, responds when the connection fails.'

'Rubbish, sometimes I have the same problem with my wife. She's a devil to wake up after a few gin and tonics.'

Somehow Adam was going to have to prove Madeline was a machine but it wasn't going to be easy especially as she was designed to emulate a human female in every possible way. Even her skin was exactly like… skin. Now that the Americans had reskinned her, she even had a scattering of freckles, moles and wrinkles to add to the realism. There was no hatch to lift up or panel to unclip. No mechanical noises either now that the diesel engine had been replaced with a state-of-the-art miniature fuel cell. He could cut into her skin to show titanium bones but he knew Madeline would kill him for such wilful defacement – if she eventually woke up. Stoddard had an overwhelming urge to handle her, purely in an effort to make her more comfortable. For no apparent reason, Stoddard removed her black leather high-heeled boots. Perhaps to allow her to fit more easily on the sofa. He dribbled slightly as even more of her perfect legs were revealed. Her silky skin was smooth and tanned just the right amount all the way up to her underwear she now had to wear. Somehow her short skirt had ruffled up indiscreetly but no one had thought it their responsibility to pull it down. Due to an unfortunate event involving Adam and a handgun, there was a small imperfection. One foot had half a big toe missing. He squirmed with the memory but immediately realised that this was the proof he was after.

'There, have a close look at her toe.'

Adam didn't have to ask twice. Stoddard's dribbling intensified as he

lifted her foot and gazed into the wound. Disappearing into the remainder of her toe were several wires which used to be connected to a USB socket. The protruding bone was a greyish metal, not calcium.

'USB… There used to be a USB connection there to link her up to a PC but I shot it off. Don't ask!' said Adam, reliving the unfortunate event.

'But she's… she's perfect!'

'I know, in every way you could possibly imagine,' boasted Adam.

Stoddard had to sit down. He reached into his pocket for a tissue, his dribble had turned into a torrent of slobber. He was, after all, a professional who had been trained to stay indifferent and focused when faced with extreme distractions such as this. Nevertheless, this revelation would certainly be hard to forget.

'Well, give me a stiff one, barkeep!' said Stoddard aptly, still pretending to be a cowboy.

Madeline Bull was purposely designed to have this effect on men. This was classed as part of her weaponry. Her beauty was intoxicating – the Aphrodite ratio, apparently one step up from the Golden ratio. Her compelling looks instantly entranced the opposite sex. Her figure naturally complimented her face, having almost unrealistic and unattainable proportions that nudged well into the erotic zone, even when fully clothed.

'I see. So, that's what all this is about: Barton's daughter, Mr Poultney, that woman in the culvert…' reiterated Stoddard.

'Her name was Angela,' interrupted Adam. 'Poultney wanted to hijack the whole system for himself and ultimately, the Americans but Alexander had his own designs on it. He wanted it as a gift for the Residents of Wardate.

'Wardate?' asked Stoddard.

'From what I can gather, a society for truly evil people.'

Stoddard had a question that had never been asked before.

'Who's in charge of all this technology, now?'

'Poppy Cock, and that's who it should be.' said Adam confidently.

This was certainly the correct answer. Officially, it used to be Paul Brownsword, formerly known as Turner but unfortunately, he had been murdered.

'You know, documenting this case is going to be a hell of a challenge.' said Stoddard.

‘Listen, there is no case! Poppy’s whereabouts have to remain totally secret. No one must know of her location. As you can gather, Madeline’s biggest weakness is the vulnerability of Poppy. Without Poppy, there is no Madeline. With Poppy safe and secure, Madeline can get on with being invincible and fighting evil.’

Stoddard pondered for a while then strolled over to the window. He watched a motorcycle drive off, had another good long look at Madeline graced on the sofa and then got on his police radio.

‘Charlie Echo, apprehend a motorcyclist heading north on Leys Lane. Registration 614 RTW.’

And then he summarised the *case*. ‘Aaron Alexander is clearly a deranged, psychopathic killer. I think we’ll leave it at that.’

Alexander, the scientist who was at the root of all the evilness, the one who had set fire to the barn which contained Poppy’s tank, had concealed himself away somewhere in the grounds of the farmhouse. He was waiting for the right moment to slide away, unnoticed. Unfortunately, he had chosen completely the wrong moment and was seen by Stoddard through the lounge window. Two miles down the lane he was pulled over and arrested for several murders, attempted murder, child abduction, attempted theft of government property and arson.

3. Two new recruits

Barton's instructions for Adam were simple:

Take Madeline away and keep her safe.

Wait for Madeline to activate.

How Barton wished his tasks were as simple as Adam's. The genius professor desperately wanted assistance. He wanted others to share in his challenge but the best people were either dead or handcuffed. However, there were other geniuses available and shortly he had come up with two names. He was well aware that geniuses are often eccentric, unreliable and questionable. Only Angela had proved to be made of the right stuff and for that virtue, she was horribly murdered.

By the time Barton had driven to the hospital to see his daughter, spent some quality time with her and driven back to the farmhouse, two new recruits were waiting impatiently. The first was Doctor Pierre Merlu, a biomechanics specialist. The second was Dean Hake, specialising in computer science and electronics. Both were waiting in their cars, desperate for the toilet, dying for a hot drink and eager for an explanation. Intentionally he ushered them away from the cowshed and into the house. After he had made them a drink and showed them where the toilet was, he talked a little about the beautiful countryside and the inclement weather. Several minutes of valuable time were consumed, wastefully, but specifically for a purpose.

'You talked about a critically ill patient with a unique illness. As much as I love this part of the country and take an interest in the weather, I do have other commitments. So, exactly where *is* the patient?' asked Pierre Merlu, speaking in perfect Oxford English despite clearly having a French name and being French.

'You said it was a life and death situation, you don't seem to be in much of a hurry.' complained Dean Hake.

Barton relaxed his pleasantries. 'Before we go any further, I must stress that what happens here goes no further. It is imperative that everything you are about to see and do here, you keep to yourself. What you are about to experience is extraordinary and unique and

must remain a secret. Three people associated with the project are now dead. Loose tongues will certainly endanger your lives and your family's. If this has deterred you, leave now and forget you were ever here… Now, Gentlemen, do I have your assurances?'

He waited for their reactions. Other than a hesitant nod from both of them, they remained silent. That was it, they were now on the team. He hoped he had chosen well because two more people were about to know all about the Madeline Bull project. He directed them out of the house, across the yard, unlocked the cowshed door and encouraged them to go in.

'Welcome to the Madeline Bull project.'

Dean Hake and Pierre Merlu gazed at the charred rafters and the smoke-stained equipment. A look of bewilderment formed across their faces.

'Is this some kind of joke!?' Hake ranted.

'I wish it was. This is what remains of the project and in that tank over there is what I need your skills for.'

Barton motioned them over to the stainless-steel tank and carefully removed the lid. Within, floating in a dirty liquid, was the pitiful form of Poppy Cock, connected up to hundreds of wires, tubes and all kinds of electronic wizardry. Conveniently and perhaps, fortunately, she was still unconscious and oblivious to her horrendous state.

'Remarkable! Simulated Human Integrated Transmogrify. And who is the unfortunate subject?' asked Merlu.

'Her name is irrelevant, but clearly you are familiar with the process?' suggested Barton, somewhat surprised.

'I have some experience, yes. I did my thesis on human-robotic control. Am I right in thinking there is an associated transceptor?' asked Merlu.

'Transceptor, a new kind of dinosaur?' Hake suggested light-heartedly.

'Transceptor: Simply a receiving medium that is linked to a controlling force over a distance. In this case, I assume it's an automaton controlled by a human, yes?' suggested Merlu.

'Err, yes precisely,' confirmed Barton.

'Good God, so that's what this is all about. That young woman who's been in all the papers. The one whose being going around the world terminating villains, she's a drone then?' surmised Hake excitedly.

'Well, it seems, gentlemen, no gaps need to be filled in. You are up

and running to speed. Shall we get started?' suggested Barton.

And so, they did. Fresh white lab coats miraculously appeared and expensive-looking folding tool boxes were opened up. It seemed that Barton couldn't have chosen better. He just hoped that they would live up to his expectations. Despite the complexity of the project, cleaning, rewiring and component changing were essentially the tasks to be performed. Barton's specialities were manifold but first and foremost his skills were directed towards Poppy's welfare. Remarkably she was alive. She had survived the fire and all its damaging qualities. She sported a strong heartbeat, her breathing was steady and fortunately, she was peacefully unconscious. Hopefully, he could get her entertainment system working before she regained consciousness and then she could watch this week's episode of *Downton Abbey*.

4. Jenny has changed

Where was the safest place to take Madeline? The Isle of Skye in Scotland strangely came into Adam's head. This was odd because he had never visited any part of the land of the kilts, bagpipes and porridge before and had no idea where the Isle of Skye was. All he knew was that it was a long way and he would need a warm coat. First, though, he had to call in at his home, in Bristol.

It had been a while. In fact, it had been several weeks since Adam last visited his modest townhouse in Bristol. In that time, many things had happened: He had experienced the delights of South Wales, including Barry Island, faced death, been shot at – twice, almost blown up, poked menacingly in his neck with a gun, been gassed, crammed uncomfortably into a car boot and recovered a dead body from a culvert. On the other hand, life had been thrilling, stimulating and mostly wonderful. This was mainly because he had been reunited with Poppy, his fiancée who was masquerading as Madeline Bull, the feisty British agent. The last time he graced the threshold there was an awkward moment with his lesbian lodger, Jenny. This time the moment contrasted sharply. She gave him a tight hug and kissed him on the lips. Naturally, this somewhat took Adam by surprise.

'Nice to see you too!' said Adam, marginally embarrassed.

Adam entered *his* house even though he distinctly had the feeling that he was the guest. He stepped into *his* lounge and had a quick glance around. Nothing had changed except that it was unusually tidy.

'Where've you been? I've missed you. The last I heard, you were in hospital with gunshot wounds in your legs, my poor little soldier,' said Jenny softly, gently stroking his arm.

Firstly, he wasn't Jenny's little anything and secondly, why was she so tactile? He raced up the stairs without replying. Ten minutes later he had packed a small case and shaved off his small goatee beard. Jenny cornered him again at the bottom of the stairs. For some reason, she had removed a layer of clothing.

'You've shaved your goatee off, it was growing on me,' said Jenny with a groan.

‘A spontaneous thing, not sure why I did really. The razor was there and next thing, it was off.’

Impulsively, Jenny gently caressed his new soft cheeks with both hands. Her pupils dilated slightly, her eyes sparkled in a saucy way and without any warning pulled his lips to hers. After no more than thirty seconds, Adam forcibly broke free.

‘Jenny, what the…? I thought you were…?’

‘Gay? I am! Oh my God, why did I do that?’

She glanced down at what she wasn’t wearing. She grabbed the hall curtains and tried her best to wrap herself in them.

‘I’m so sorry, I don’t know what came over me.’

‘Don’t apologise, not my worst experience,’ Adam smiled.

‘I’m so embarrassed. If I was straight, obviously you’d be up those stairs and I’d have you, Madeline or no Madeline but, yaky yak! Girls are so much nicer to kiss!’

‘No offence taken! Anyway, let’s face it, if you were straight, you wouldn’t be staying here,’ said Adam.

‘No offence taken, but if I was straight, I definitely wouldn’t be staying here!’ said Jenny.

She hastily rushed upstairs leaving Adam admiring his new clean-shaven look in the wall mirror. A few moments later Jenny reappeared, now decently dressed.

‘Something important I need to tell you. Two men called a few days ago asking after you. Since then, they’ve been sitting in their car parked across the road – haven’t budged, look!’

Jenny gently pulled back the net curtains in the bay window.

‘Well, would you credit it, they’ve gone! I’m sure they were there a few minutes ago.’

Adam looked out of the window, ‘Oh shit!’

Adam raced outside and over to his car. He had not heeded Barton’s warning. True, he had been distracted somewhat but who the hell would kidnap a snoozing human-looking robot out of a parked car down a quiet street? But they had. Just to make it easy for whoever they were, Adam hadn’t even bothered to lock the car. He pointlessly searched the interior of the Volvo.

‘Shit, shit, shit!’

Adam's blood pressure instantly reached a dangerous level. His head and neck performed a neat colour change trick that all known androids, including Madeline Bull, cannot do. Sweat spontaneously formed on his red brow and his collar melted into his damp neck. He had cocked up his simple mission almost before it had begun. He side-stepped the imaginary hole that had opened up before him just before it swallowed him up, and then phoned Barton.

'Hi, err, little problem, well really huge actually. Madeline appears to have been kidnapped.'

Barton was not one for dramatics, yelling down his mobile phone would not help matters. The tone of his reply almost reflected an expectation that this would happen.

'How long?' he despaired.

'Literally minutes ago.'

'Naturally, you have to find her. I would imagine their priority is to get her out of the country as quickly as possible. Where are you?'

'At home – Bristol. Was going to take her to Scotland, didn't get very far, did I?' chuckled Adam nervously.

'Apparently not! Look, her system is down at the moment. As soon as I have the link-up, I'll concentrate on overriding her eyesight. Maybe then we'll get some clues as to her whereabouts. Perhaps one day we'll get around to fitting her with a tracking device. Have you got a smartphone?'

'Yes, pretty smart.'

'Good, I'll let you know when she's active. Then you'll be able to access her sight channel. In the meantime, do your best. There must be some clues around.'

This was not one of Adam's better days. Pathetic, useless, and incompetent were words Barton hadn't used. He was far too polite to say what he was thinking. Adam was determined to put matters right, he had to find Madeline.

'Jenny, can you describe the men?'

'Normal I suppose. Medium height, Jeans and jacket, white-skinned.'

'Had they got an accent?'

'Yes, now you come to mention it.'

'Great, what?'

'Don't know, definitely an accent.'

‘Great! I’ll go and search the gutter.’

Whoever they were, they had been brought up properly. Nothing whatsoever had been discarded through the car window, nothing left in the gutter, not even a fag end dropped. Adam scratched the back of his head and then his eyes panned across the familiar street. The light was fading, soon that would be that, he might as well go inside, watch TV, open a tinny and eat something. ‘What a bloody good idea,’ he thought, ‘when *did* I last eat?’ But then he noticed an overflowing litter bin attached to a nearby lamp post.

Perhaps the kitchen worktop was not the best place to sift through the entire contents of a public litter bin but the bright fluorescent lighting was in his favour. It was a bad time for Jenny to enter the kitchen.

‘What the hell!’

She was not best pleased with the unhygienic waste scattered across the expanse where she buttered her toast, rolled out pastry and chopped her veg. Adam had migrated across to a clear bit of worktop to examine a soggy foreign newspaper.

‘I’ll clear it up in a min.’

‘You’d better! What are you looking at? You’ll find that’s Polish.’

‘You know Polish?’

‘No, but I know ‘Nowosci’ is a Polish newspaper, seen it at work. Some of the Polish contractors read it.

‘Poland! They’ve taken her to Poland!’ exclaimed Adam.

‘Who’s taken who?’ asked Jenny.

‘Those men, they’ve taken Madeline to Poland.’

‘Madeline? Poland? Why would they do that?’ asked Jenny, incredulously.

‘Yes, yes, Poland. Need my passport!’

Adam bounded up the stairs, leaving Jenny somewhat puzzled by his rash conclusion. She was also annoyed that in the short time Adam had been home he had managed to decimate her lovely rented kitchen.

‘I’ll tidy up later.’ Adam shouted down from his seriously underused bedroom.

‘Yes, yes, of course, you will!’ said Jenny, she knew that later could mean weeks, if not months and she wanted her kitchen back well before tea time. There was no point in making a scene, pointless

complaining, he was, after all, a single, undomesticated man and this was one of the many penalties of sharing a house with one. Besides, on reflection, it would be better to clear the mess up herself. If Adam did eventually take on the job, he certainly wouldn't disinfect the surfaces or recycle the rubbish in the correct coloured bins. Moments later, Adam launched himself down the stairs skirting over most of the steps.

'See you later. If anyone wants me, I'll be in Poland.'

Adam appeared to be absorbing the moment in the most hyperactive way possible, failing completely to abate his momentum from the descent of the stairs. Fortunately, the front door was open or else there would have been a nasty collision, a smashed front door and another spell in hospital.

'Adam, when I said an accent, I didn't mean foreign.'

Adam was well out of earshot before Jenny had finished her sentence. Adam was on a mission, blinkered and impetuous. A little common sense would have stopped him in his tracks but he hadn't any time for that.

5. A Polish interrogation

Adam soon found himself standing on Polish soil, Warsaw's to be precise.

In actual fact, Madeline had been taken to a place somewhere in Cheshire, which, as most people know, is in England, not Poland. The place happened to be Shawlsdown Hall, a huge Jacobean mansion in several acres of grounds containing wild dear, sheep and many security guards. It wasn't widely broadcast but rumours had it that Shawlsdown hall was used exclusively by the government – MI 5 or 6 or 7 or something. The number didn't particularly matter. What did matter was what went on inside behind the bland red brick walls and obscured glass windows.

It would have been sensible to find a nice hotel and sit tight until he had a call from Barton but Adam was Adam. No harm in asking around, he thought and where better than in a salt-of-the-earth, good old Polish beer hall. Of course, he had nothing to go on, he could barely speak the language and the only spending power he had was by means of a credit card with Madeline Bull's name on it.

Maybe it was this fact or the unusual question he was asking the numerous barmen which roughly translated as this: 'I would like to find men with an attractive woman?' Whichever it was, he found himself very swiftly in a police cell awaiting interrogation.

'Damn, damn and bollocks', he shouted out loudly in his small dimly lit cell. Once again, he had cocked it up and this time he knew absolutely no one was at hand to rescue him. Frankly, it was even worse than this because his mobile phone and credit card had been retained for evidence. 'Damn, damn, damn and bollocks', he pathetically repeated.

To get burnt alive to within an inch of your life is terribly unfortunate but then, a few months later to be boiled like a cabbage really is the pits. Poppy was alive – remarkably. Her heart was as strong as Gorilla glass and her constitution was undaunted. However, she was unconscious and had been for several days. They say that beauty is

only skin deep and that is the only consolation that could be offered. Hopefully, though, she would never be in a position to see what an awful state her skin – and body were in.

The electronics surrounding her were relatively unaffected and took little effort to get up and running. Madeline had, in fact, a fully functioning GPS *system* within her frame. This was something Barton had completely overlooked. Why she had GPS was simply because she had a little spare space in her skull and what better to fill it with than the useful functions of a smartphone. Not only did she have GPS but also WIFI, Bluetooth, accelerometer, FM radio, MP3 player, camera, etc, etc. None of these applications had as yet been used but with a few software commands, they could easily be brought into use.

Conveniently, at the very same moment Barton decided to ring Adam, he was being interrogated by two members of the Polish special police. This was a stroke of luck because they were in an ideal situation to hand the confiscated phone over to Adam to answer.

'Adam, good news! Well, good news and bad I suppose. I've located Madeline with her GPS. Where are you?' chirped Barton.

'Well, would you believe it! At this very moment I'm being interrogated by two nice guys in Warsaw police station,' said Adam sheepishly.

'Poland, eh? Well, you certainly never cease to amaze me. As best as I can work out, Madeline is at a place called Shawlsdown Hall, Cheshire. That's Cheshire, I'm pretty sure that's not in Poland.'

'Right, right, you've made your point. Shawlsdown Hall, never heard of it?'

'Let me know when you get there,' said Barton curtly.

It would never be said that Barton was losing his patience with Adam but when his sentences were short and precise, it was a clear indication of incredulity. Adam sensed the despair in his voice. It was the worst form of bollocking he could possibly get.

Fortunately, the two policemen interrogating Adam could speak a modicum of queen's English so it wasn't long before Adam had successfully conveyed his slightly embellished version of the facts: He was looking for his girlfriend, Madeline Bull. He'd been tipped off that two men had forced her on a plane bound for Poland against her will and that's why he was here.

As it happened, he didn't have to explain himself. They knew exactly who he was: the sidekick of the famous Madeline Bull, known throughout the civilised world for her outrageous exploits.

Consequently, they had no reason to keep him locked up. They gave him back the credit card with Madeline's name on it, wished him the best of luck in his search and let him get on his way.

However, the Polish police certainly were not going to miss an opportunity like this. They decided to join in with all the rest who were discretely following Adam across Europe. The reason why Adam was attracting so much interest was wholly to do with Madeline. Realistically, no one was interested in the strange antics of her impetuous boyfriend. It was just that, more often than not, the wagging tail would inevitably find the dog.

The problem when too many people try to follow you discreetly is that they become blatantly indiscreet. Adam couldn't fail to notice the commotion going on in his shadows.

6. Infamous Madeline Bull

Back in Evesham, England, in a burnt-out cow shed, three geniuses pondered productively over Poppy's parched pelt. Finally, they all agreed it was time for activation. They had agreed to use one of Dean Hake's suggestions: a special silicone gel suit around Poppy's naked blighted body. This was thought much more beneficial than simply floating, unprotected, in the saline solution. The gel suit made the process of reconnecting the sensors back on Poppy's charred skin easier, quicker and more secure. Poppy would also have less pain to contend with when moving around in her tank.

It had taken three whole days with very little rest time to get to this stage. The lid on the tank was screwed down and Poppy was, once again, isolated from the real world. Only the relayed senses from Madeline Bull, the incredible android machine, would now be experienced by Poppy's entombed body. Barton clicked the button on the mouse pad a few times, crossed his fingers and then, for no apparent reason, took a few steps back.

Little pumps whirred into action and slowly the correct amount of drug solutions flowed along plastic pipes into the side of the tank and on into Poppy's veins.

The room was virtually silent. The wall-mounted TV in the distance was on mute and tuned into a nondescript News channel. It happened to be showing some kind of commotion outside a high-security prison. The three scientists stood still and silent, hardly breathing, hoping to hear some kind of response from Poppy through the small monitor speakers on Barton's laptop.

'She should be stirring by now,' said Barton.

'Poppy, can you hear me? It's Barton.' there was no response.

'Administering five cc of adrenalin.' said Hake as he twisted a small valve on a plastic tube.

After a few seconds, the laptop screen indicated faint impulses from her muscles, she was awake.

'Poppy, Poppy, can you hear me? You will feel disorientated for a while but it should pass.'

‘Where… am I? Are you… God? Is this heaven?’ Poppy’s voice was weak and slurred.

‘It’s Barton and you’re in South Wales.’

‘I see, not God and not heaven then?!’

‘Still got your sense of humour, I see.’

‘And who am I going to be this time? Still Madeline or have I had a sex change?’ Poppy’s voice was getting stronger all the time.

Barton ignored her comment. To reiterate, the reason why Madeline was indeed a woman, specifically a stunningly gorgeous one, with sex oozing out of every wrinkle and crease, was done for a reason. She was the ultimate Honeytrap. With this asset, she could extract more out of people (mostly men) than a hunk wearing a tuxedo filled with an arsenal of weapons and torture devices.

‘Your video and audio circuits aren’t patched through yet, sorry about the blue screens. You’re very weak, you won’t be able to operate the system yet, you still need to rest.’

‘Rest? How long have I been asleep?’

‘Four days.’

‘Four days and I still need rest? Turn the gain up or something!’

‘Poppy, you don’t know what has happened to you.’

‘Yes, I do, I was poached!’

‘Your skin is extremely fragile. We’ve had to place your body in a gel suit to hold it together. The gel suit is impregnated with a cocktail of steroids and cortisones which should eventually toughen up your skin but until then, any movement will be painful.’

‘You think I’m not used to living with pain then, eh?’

Barton stroked the mouse pad and clicked the button a few times and Poppy was fully connected to Madeline. He knew it was too soon.

Life was suddenly thrust upon her again. Once more she was beautiful, once more she was restrained, strapped to a table. ‘No change there then,’ she thought!

‘Bye the way, thought you ought to know, you’re now in Cheshire, a place called Shawlsdown hall’, said Barton. ‘We think it’s some kind of government department.’

Previously, it had taken weeks to shake off the reality of being in a tank and remotely controlling the Madeline Bull android. Now though,

the transition only took a few moments. Then she was convinced she was inside the head of Madeline. Despite her obvious predicament and the discomfort, it was still wonderful. Not, however as wonderful as her dream or whatever it was when she was back as Poppy, paddling in that cool idyllic stream with Adam by her side.

She thought about that dream, it was so, so real. Everything made sense: Wardate was Ward 8 – the hospital ward where she resided. Most of the people in her dream were nurses, doctors and patients in the hospital. The names of the people she had to kill, Ray de Part, for instance, turned out to be a portion of the sign 'X-*ray depart*ment' she could see through the partly opened door. It had to be a dream because, in it, her body had fully recovered and was perfect again. Not possible! Burns like that don't heal to that degree, especially with the severity of *her* frazzled frame. No, now was reality, surely, Madeline was reality. Yes, she was beautiful and sexy, even more so than her own Poppy body used to be but, it was an artificial world. True, now it took a moderate amount of concentration to even imagine herself as a burnt husk of a human being but that's what she was. Perhaps this was because her subconscious was in denial. It was, after all, a thought that was permanently avoided like a hail storm. Her new Madeline body felt as real as could be, she was Madeline Bull again!

Madeline looked around as best she could whilst tightly strapped down on an operating table /trolley/whatever. She was apparently incarcerated in an old period building: tall ceilings with elaborate plaster cornicing, a large heavy door with antique polished brass fittings and a large Georgian window, complete with internal shutters. It reminded her too much of her old dentist's waiting room.

She was alone in the room. Clearly being inactive for several days, the intrigue and fascination of what they had captured, had faded somewhat. She was still intact, with no arms or legs missing – this was good. Her head hadn't been shaved and all her clothes were still covering her up, not scattered on the floor – this was also good.

'Hello!' she shouted.

It was a weak shout but would, no doubt, improve as time went by.

'Hello, anyone there!'

Her voice was getting louder.

'I said, HELLO!!'

Her voice was back with vengeance.

Moments later, a young well-dressed man entered.

‘So sorry’, he said sincerely ‘Almost gave up on you. We’ve been out looking for a Prince Charming to give you a kiss to wake you up.’

‘Funny ha, ha! Why the restraints then if you’re so sorry’.

‘Sorry, I can make you more comfortable if you want. We didn’t want to mislay you. You took quite a bit of finding. Sorry, Names Pike, Neil… So, you’re the infamous Madeline Bull?’

‘Infamous… surely famous?’

‘Sorry, yes.’

Pike took out his mobile phone and called someone.

‘It… She’s activated… awake, sorry.’

That was it, Pike had said all he was going to say and Madeline certainly wasn’t going to encourage him to continue with his apologetic babble. Within minutes, the door violently flew open and then several suited men and women oozed in. One of the suited men, older and meaner looking than the rest, broke from the crowd,

‘Madeline Bull, well, well,’ said the man.

‘Yes, I am this person lying here, tied up,’

‘Sorry, I’m Nuttall, Brian Nuttall.’

‘Good God, why are you all so damn insincerely apologetic!?’

They had all heard of this amazing feisty android called Madeline Bull and now they were experiencing this remarkable feistiness first-hand. They smiled at each other and desperately wanted her autograph but knew it would be completely unprofessional. They wanted to touch and fondle her – again, but now that she was awake, she might zap them with some secret weapon they didn’t know about. Her fart gas was legendary as was her laser finger but who knows what else she had in her arsenal.

‘You’re in safe hands. Our government paid for you at a vast expense so we thought it was high time that we got to know each other – have a little chat as it were,’ said Nuttall.

‘Go on, I like little chats,’ said Madeline.

‘Put simply, you are ours. We built you so we thought it fit that we claim you back and that you start working for us, again.’

‘Who are you then, MI 5 or 6 or something? Do I get an O O number? More to the point, do I have a choice?’

‘Actually, MI7 and no, you don’t’, said Nuttall.

‘MI7? Never heard of it.’

‘Officially MI7 closed down after the war but unofficially it’s still open. We’re a top-secret department that…’

‘Don’t tell me, does top secret things? Anyway, I’ve already worked for a government department with Brownsword, before he was killed.’

‘That’s as maybe but we work differently here. Naturally, assassination has become your forte but often there are ways of getting results without chopping people up into bits and poisoning them.’

‘Let’s get cracking then, untie me and give me my first mission,’ said Madeline with false eagerness.

‘As I’ve said, we do things differently here,’ said Nuttall

‘How differently, exactly?’

‘We will show you.’

Madeline was untied. She did her best to hide the pain as she rose from the table, but unavoidably a wince displayed across her gorgeous face. The Madeline automaton had not moved for a long time mainly because the operator, Poppy, had not been conscious. Oil or whatever it was that lubricated Madeline’s moving parts needed to spread and circulate, therefore, her first few steps were almost geriatric. If Madeline did decide to run for it, now would not be a good time. Surprisingly quickly, however, she became fluid in her movements although bearing the pain remained a challenge for Poppy in her stainless-steel tank. And then all her pain stopped and she felt wonderful, agile and in control. This was mainly because Barton had increased the flow of morphine into Poppy’s bloodstream.

‘Adam, it’s Barton, where are you?’

‘Just gone through passport control.’

‘Good. You need to get to Cheshire, something’s going on.’

‘No surprise there then, how’s Poppy?’

‘Remarkable. She really does have the constitution of an ox. Apparently, Madeline’s in the company of MI7.’

‘Didn’t know there was such a thing?’

‘She’s just had a chat with a chap called Nuttall.’

‘Nut oil?

‘Nuttall!’

‘Okay Prof, cool it. I’m on the case!’

Barton pressed the ‘end’ button on his mobile before he said something he would almost certainly regret.

Poppy was indeed remarkable, not by any means indestructible but certainly many would have died many times over going through what Poppy had gone through over the last twelve months. She was, however, still very ill despite controlling an automaton now at the peak of mechanical health.

Barton had to make a tough decision. He was all too aware of her fragility but it was imperative that she was moved to a safe and secure location. She had been moved before but then she was unaware of it even though she did suffer from unexplainable travel sickness. However, this time, it was going to be a far greater challenge; a room full of life support equipment was attached to her frail form.

The location of her new home had to be completely secret, not even Adam could know. After all, Madeline’s greatest weakness was the human being who controlled her and Poppy’s greatest threat was from Madeline’s enemies.

7. Shawlsdown Hall

Apparently, there is no such thing as MI7, at least that's what they want people to think. *Apparently,* MI7 is so top secret that even the people who work for MI7 often doubt that it exists. MI 6 is well known for secret agents, secret missions and so on but that's where the covertness ends. Everybody knows where they are – the big building at the side of the Thames and the names of the '*secret'* agents are *probably* listed on Wikipedia. MI7, conversely, is so secret that even talking about it is risking this novel being censored.

The reason they had Madeline was, in the grand scheme of things, relatively straightforward. Madeline Bull was a massive asset to Britain, the British government and British intelligence. Up to now, she had stumbled her way through her short existence. To be fair, she had been successful in her vital missions but this had been more by luck than judgement. Despite her invulnerable reputation, she was still relatively fragile even after the upgrade she had from the Americans. One armour-piercing bullet, grenade or IUD would certainly scatter her high-tech contents very effectively. This was not good enough.

MI7 thought that Madeline Bull was no more and no less than a very advanced machine, controlled by a nifty bit of computer programming. They were way off the mark. Earlier reticence had been successful.

From the start, Brownsword – Turner as he was known then, insisted that as few people as possible knew the truth behind Madeline Bull. This amounted to a handful of scientists and surgeons. However, even though Brownsword and two of the scientists were now dead, the list was ever-growing. Where ever possible, people temporarily involved, like the two surgeons and Hake and Merlu, for instance, were hypnotised to forget all about the Madeline Bull project. If they ever did blab, they were hypnotically conditioned to instantly and uncontrollably squawk like a chicken for the rest of their lives. As for Alexander, he would doubtlessly be incarcerated and condemned as a madman in solitary confinement. Who would ever listen to him? This effectively left only Barton, Adam and now Inspector Stoddard who knew the truth behind Madeline Bull – specifically that she uses the essence of Poppy Cock.

Madeline Bull's talents had been well noted. Admittedly not always fully approved of, but the inescapable facts were that Madeline Bull has the potential to stop conflicts, terrorism and even wars. If they had a weapon such as Madeline Bull in the 1930s, there was a good chance World War II may not have happened. In the Noughties, if Madeline was around, many Middle Eastern conflicts would have been squashed well before they got going and North Korea and Russia would be no more than a day's work. In fact, as most wars are triggered or encouraged by a single individual, a simple solution would be to send Madeline in to have a little word in their ear. If that didn't work, a little use of her laser finger weapon would, no doubt, be extremely effective. Simply put, Madeline was not being used to her full potential.

If there was one thing Madeline hated it was being dissected, dismantled, disassembled, upgraded, tweaked and generally messed with. However, what she had gone through before was nothing compared to what she was about to go through.

It has to be said that everyone was very friendly, amicable and genuinely concerned for her feelings even though they all firmly believed that somewhere inside her, there was probably just a processor chip being overclocked to the maximum.

As she was wheeled out from a lift that had descended a considerable way, a completely different decor greeted her. Gone was the grandeur of the oak-panelled walls, herringbone maple floors, the Chippendale furniture and faded oil paintings. Now the coldness of emulsioned breeze blocks and fluorescent ceiling lights filled her vision. To Madeline, this was all too familiar, like her original home conveniently sited underneath a prosthetics lab.

It was only fair that Madeline should know what was going to happen to her, so they told her.

'We are going to upgrade you and make you indestructible,' said Nuttall.

'Not again!' sighed Madeline.

And that was that.

This was the plan: A team of highly talented engineers would replace her entire titanium skeleton with boron nitride. And then when they had done this, install a graphene lattice under her artificial skin. When all that was done, her skin would be completely replaced with an indestructible carbon nanotube material. If she had been human which she obviously wasn't, this mammoth operation would have been very, very painful. However, being an automaton, it probably

wouldn't even tickle.

Madeline used the 'time under the knife' wisely: She caught up on several hours of TV soaps, watched dozens of films and completed countless puzzles and escape games. Apparently, all credit to all the engineers, they made a superb job. True, the operation took over three weeks to complete, which was somewhat inconvenient but after all, this was something that couldn't be rushed. Madeline was surprisingly patient throughout and took almost no interest in what they were doing. As long as there were no scars, she remained jaw-droppingly gorgeous and everything still worked perfectly, she really couldn't give a hoot. After all, it was a useful time for convalescence which was what Poppy needed – loads of rest and television.

Something else that's good about being an android/ automaton/ whatever, is that when it's done, it's done. No recovery time, no secondary infections, no drains, no MRSA, no stitches to take out, no scars, no rehabilitation, absolutely nothing.

'Okay, Madeline Bull, you're now pretty much indestructible. Your skin is now entirely carbon nanotube. All your bones have been replaced with chloro-bromine. Your hearing and eyesight have been upgraded and we have taken the liberty of installing a communication system, happy?' said Nuttall just like a real surgeon would.

'Yes, fine,' said Madeline with indifference. 'Got a mirror?'

A mirror was produced from somewhere. She examined her face, her hair, eyes and skin. Everything was exactly the same. She was still gorgeous.

'Well, I don't feel any different. Okay, what now?' she said casually.

'The upgrade has been the first of three development stages. The next stage is training and the final stage is compliance,' said Nuttall nonchalantly.

'Compliance? Doesn't that mean obedience, as in dog? Like to know how you're going to do that?'

'Quite easy really,' said Nuttall as he walked over to a monitor and turned it on.

'Adam!' screamed Madeline with delight.

'*Hi sweetheart*,' a perky reply whimpered through the monitor speaker.

Three things Adam was not very good at, were planning, thinking ahead and playing chess. Inevitably, getting Madeline out of a high-security building in the depths of the countryside, surrounded by armed police, required some of these skills. Adam decided to go ahead

anyway – just break in, find Madeline, untie her (if she was tied up) and leave quietly. Consequently, this procedure failed instantly. He climbed a fence with a big red 'keep out' notice fastened to it and the next thing he knew, he was locked in a small comfortable room complete with plush carpet, comfy bed and a large screen TV – with all the sports channels installed. He had failed again. He truly was Madeline's weakness and Nuttall knew this.

'You do anything to my Adam and you'll see another side of me,' said Madeline sternly.

'What do you take us for, thugs? Now you've seen him, he's free to go, or stay a while and use our amenities. We have an a la carte restaurant, sauna, Jacuzzi and a fully equipped gym,' said Nuttall amicably.

'Your point?' puzzled Madeline.

'We can find him and bring him in at any time we want and make life very unpleasant for him. But, as I've said, we're not thugs, we just want some means of chaining down a loose cannon.'

'Loose cannon?'

'A feisty android,' said Nuttall bluntly.

'Oh that,' said Madeline quietly.

It would always be a mystery to the uninitiated, why such an advanced, cutting-edge machine, automaton, had been programmed to embrace love and develop a relationship with a human. Surely this was a serious flaw in her programming and clearly a weakness. However, there was nothing that could be done about it. Nuttall and his team of scientists were certainly not qualified to interfere with such an advanced piece of AI software – wherever it was situated in her frame. Of course, it wasn't situated in her frame at all because she used Poppy Cock's intelligence, persona and feelings, but they didn't know this.

'Are you alright Sweetheart?'

'Fine, fine, can't grumble,' Adam whimpered through the monitor.

'How long have you been here?'

'Oh, only a few weeks. Time has passed quite quickly, really.'

'I'm so sorry. They're letting you go now. Don't worry about me, I'm fine, more than fine. Just have some training to do. It shouldn't take long then we'll be together.'

To recap, Madeline has six effective weapons:

Her knock-out fart gas.

Two fingers that performed as a Taser weapon.

A finger that transformed into a hypodermic needle, to administer poisons.

Another finger that doubled up as a powerful laser gun.

Her 'explosive motion' which increased her strength by a factor of a hundred.

And finally, the overwhelming benefits of her 'Aphrodite ratio' gorgeousness.

This was indeed a comprehensive range of combat devices for such a delicate, unassuming, defenceless slip of a girl. However, past results were by sheer luck and cunning more than the skilled use of her artillery. Because of her complete lack of fear, feistiness was Madeline's way, certainly not by old-fashioned stuffy discipline. However, in the eyes of the military, this was a serious weakness. Certain high-ranking anonymous officials had noticed this inappropriate and irresponsible behaviour. They insisted that the matter of proper disciplinary training must be addressed whether she liked it or not. After all, she did carry a massive responsibility with her unique arsenal.

Madeline decided to send a text to Adam, hoping that he still had his mobile phone on him. The text would have been something simple like 'I love you', but immediately a serious problem became apparent.

'Okay, what the hell have you done with my mole!?' screamed Madeline.

'Sorry, mole?' asked a confused Nuttall.

'The mole on my arm, it was there before you messed. My mouse for controlling all my functions! Without it, I can't do anything,' said Madeline sternly.

The mole acted like a computer mouse, selecting menus at the top of her vision. These menus controlled just about everything, including weapons, explosive motion, the Internet and sending texts. Now, with new skin, the mole was gone and perfection was in its place. Nuttall called someone on his mobile phone.

'Where did you move the S A I to? … Okay… okay'

'S A I?' puzzled Madeline.

‘Systems access interface… Thumb and forefinger, right hand,’ said Nuttall calmly.

To be honest, the mole on her arm was not ideally placed. Rubbing her thumb and forefinger together was a much better arrangement. Now her weapons could be accessed and activated much quicker and altogether more discretely. The text was sent.

8. The training

It's fair to say that the knock-out flatulence gas had been used the most and proved very effective. Fortunately, being non-lethal, her rather indiscriminate overuse of it in the past had not particularly caused too many problems. The Taser weapon, the crudest of any weapon had had its uses, especially at short range. The laser weapon fitted by the American scientists was, in every instance that she used it, an overkill and if it didn't kill, it was more luck than judgement. This was definitely an area where a spot of training would be useful. Her hypodermic finger had been used brazenly to kill and stun. Perhaps a little training would be useful here too. Finally, her least explored weapon, 'explosive motion'. This temporarily enhanced her artificial muscle strength by up to 100 times – with remarkable results. Unfortunately to become suddenly a hundred times stronger than you were a second ago had serious drawbacks for someone with no training. Somehow, MI7 knew all about her weapons and deemed that training was compulsory – whether she liked it or not.

And so, the training began. It would take two months – no shortcuts. Madeline had to become completely in harmony with her weaponry as Poppy had done with her new body. Deployment of any weapon had to be instant, accurate and second nature. There had to be no thought involved and no hesitation, just pure instinct. Killing, maiming and stunning had to be done accurately, calmly, judgementally and quickly. She was, after all, an assassin burdened with a hell of a responsibility.

Special rooms were set up solely for each of Madeline's weapons:

The 'Fart Room', room 1, was a simple setup. Along the floor on the far wall, there was a row of cages holding wild underfed dogs. To the side of the room, a man wearing a gas mask stood nervously with a rifle. No pussyfooting about here, the rifle contained real bullets. It was all down to Madeline.

A wild dog would be released randomly without warning. If she could expel her knock-out gas from her cute little bottom before the growling dog reached her, the dog would be spared the bullet – just pass out with the gas. It was all very clever and proved to be an excellent incentive to improve her technique, principally because

Madeline was a dog lover. Like a gunman with a finger on the trigger, Madeline learnt to poise her thumb and forefinger together, ready to rub and press. All it took was one week, the slaughter of 84 dogs and the occasional instance of a mauled android arm before her response time was up to an acceptable speed. Unfortunately, sometimes the gunman would miss the dog or the gun would misfire or Madeline would inadvertently get shot. Such is life.

The training process continued almost immediately with her laser weapon. As this weapon was far more serious and altogether deadlier, the training had to be more intense. She was escorted into a darkened room – The 'Laser Room', Room 2. Another week later she could precisely and neatly slice in half, a Desmodus rotundus, in the dark, before it had a chance to peck at her beautiful artificial skin. Vampire bats really did exist. She was solely responsible for the death of hundreds of these vicious little mammals and boy did she find it satisfying.

Madeline was coming on leaps and bounds. Her reaction times were speeding up and she was becoming conditioned exactly how MI7 wanted.

No training was given for her Taser weapon. It was thought too troublesome and ineffective for any serious battle she may endure in the future. 'Only use if you really have to' was the advice given. Madeline liked this weapon for a different reason: it was a convenient way of proving to people who needed it proving to, that she really was an android and not just a sexy minx. True, at times, she had used it on her targets to piss them off just before the 'kill', but this was deemed unproductive and time-wasting. Behaving professionally at all times was to be encouraged.

Training for her hypodermic finger consisted of a one-day computer-based training course with a recognised qualification at the end of it. Madeline was predictably bored to tears and wanted the world to end there and then but she eventually came to her senses. It was only a day out of her life.

The final weapon in her artillery was the little-used 'explosive motion'. Understandably, Madeline didn't like using this Hulk-type feature as it had the potential to cause damage, mainly to her beautiful soft wrinkle-free skin. It also could incur internal damage as her inner components went through hell during the process of hitting, bending and breaking things. Regardless of this, training had to be done. She was assured that any damage would be put right but self-harm was something Madeline always tried to avoid.

To recap, normally her muscles worked at level one, no more than 5% capacity – typically the strength of an average man but this was a seriously detuned state. Explosive motion on setting five was 100% capacity – full power. At this level, she had the strength of at least thirty men – or a JCB. This meant she could easily jump over a double-decker bus if she really wanted to or even lift this very same bus off the ground – very useful if you happened to leave the wheel jack at home. It was also very useful for opening tight lids on jars of beetroot without getting the red juice all over you. She had only used it once to push open a heavily bolted security door and skewer and few guards with the legs of a chair – and that was only level 3. How could she possibly do training for this unusual talent? When explosive motion was switched on, normal movement was near on impossible. A walk turned into a dash and a hug turned into a crush.

This time, the training involved doing things Madeline *and Poppy* hated – namely cooking and washing up. She was reluctantly sent, kicking and screaming into the kitchens, firstly to help cook for all the MI7 staff. As she progressed, she would move on to being the chief washer-upper. Poppy's idea of cooking was to pierce the lid several times and then throw it in the microwave. A dishwasher then took care of the washing up.

Peeling potatoes and chopping up carrots was a living hell but excellent training for muscle control while in 'explosive motion'. Eventually, the potato peeler peeled just the potato and not her lovely skin off her fingerbones. Eventually, the knife just chopped through the carrot, not halfway through the chopping board. Two weeks it took for this degree of control and then she was allocated a huge stainless-steel sink to wash the dozens of plates and dishes. Eventually, a whole day went by without breaking a single item of crockery. The training was now complete. As a side effect, the kitchen had brought out many dormant qualities in her, including discipline, commitment and working as a team. These were virtues the old Madeline severely lacked.

But had they changed Madeline Bull, the feisty android, into some new obedient fighting machine? Highly unlikely!

'Your training is finished. Your car is out at the front. Go home and wait for instructions,' said Nuttall aloofly.

9. Back home

It has to be said, Madeline Bull was perhaps the culmination of every female fictional character to have been thought up – only better looking, sexier and much less human. However, unlike other superheroes, she was no longer a free agent. For the moment, though, this didn't bother her, she was just glad to be leaving Shawlsdown Hall.

Madeline was now effectively bugged – they called it a communication device. This violation of her personal space hadn't as yet, sunk in but Barton was fully aware of the implications. In M.I. 7's eyes, she was a very cleverly programmed android, they had no reason to think otherwise. If they ever found out that she was in fact controlled remotely by assumed dead, news reporter, Poppy Cock, it would change everything. The coexistence worked perfectly. Their sum was greater than their individual parts. Without symbiosis, there would be nothing but an inactive machine and a severely disabled human.

After a long enjoyable drive down a few congested motorways, she was back in her flat in Bristol.

Barton had to talk to her privately. The only way he could do this was to break the radio link and speak to Poppy directly in her tank.

The radio link was broken and Madeline collapsed ungainly in a heap on the hard kitchen floor.

'Sorry,' said Barton through a voice link into Poppy's tank.

'Barton! Thought you'd deserted me,' said *Poppy* amid a state of sensory deprivation.

'As if? They mustn't know about me. More importantly, they mustn't know about you. I just hope Adam can hold his tongue. Unfortunately, at the moment, the only way to talk to you is to deactivate your Madeline body. Not very practical, I'll have to put some thought into it.'

'How am I? I feel fine,' enquired Poppy

'Still on 2mg of morphine per hour but you're quite strong.'

‘Yes, but how am *I*? You know what I mean.’

‘You need Madeline. You will always need Madeline,’ said Barton succinctly.

‘Right,’ said Poppy, suppressing a mountain of emotions.

‘I’ve moved you, by the way. You have a new home.’

‘Are you going to tell me where?’

‘Best it stays with me for now,’ said Barton.

‘I understand. Don’t get killed then, will you.’

‘Goodness knows what MI7 are up to. I suspect your first mission will start pretty soon so make the most of the next few hours,’ said Barton wisely.

‘Don’t worry, I will!’

With that, Barton reactivated the transmitter and the radio link was re-established. Madeline took a moment to get her bearing. She found herself prostrate on the floor looking deeply into the grain of the wood effect laminate flooring. She quickly jumped to her feet. At that moment the doorbell rang.

It was Adam.

It seemed like a decade ago but finally, they were together again. The last time was in another existence where Madeline was Poppy and Adam was a slightly different Adam. The last time Madeline and this particular Adam were together it could hardly be described as in happy circumstances. The cowshed housing Poppy’s tank was on fire, consequently, the connection failed. As a result, Madeline, who was in the car with Adam, racing back to the farm, entered her default mode and fell asleep.

Now Madeline was well and truly awake, sentient and horny. They cuddled and kissed for a few minutes and then raced upstairs, they had a lot of catching up to do. Madeline was now trained, disciplined, apparently rebuilt and had the reaction times of a house fly. None of this made any difference when they made love – apart from folding her clothes when she took them off and making the bed when they had finished. However, this was pretty pointless because it was now late evening and time to use the bed for another purpose.

The next morning, they both woke refreshed and decided they had time to make love again before breakfast. In the fullness of time, Adam had a bowl of cereals and a strong coffee – Madeline couldn’t. Instead, she reminisced about the tea rooms and the cream scone and

paddling in the stream – Adam couldn't, he was the wrong Adam. He was, however, the Adam who went to Barry Island, so *he* reminisced about that.

They were about to go out for a walk in the park just at the moment the front door received rather rough treatment from a battering ram.

'Madeline Bull, we arrest you for the murders of Ronald Poultney, Ray de Par, Tara Gogli and Guzman Osborne,' yelled one of the Policemen.

'Here we go. No doubt Nuttall is behind this. Hopefully, I won't be too long, love you lots.'

Madeline gave Adam a hug and a kiss and left peacefully with the group of fifteen heavily armoured and gas-masked riot police.

10. Bull sent down

In a very short time, she was locked up in a prison cell without a trial, without interrogation, without any legal aid and without her designer clothes.

Over the past six weeks, the British prison service had undergone a radical shake-up. Madeline had been kept far too busy to be aware of this. On the surface, it seemed like a good idea – to bring all the 'whole life prisoners' together, under one roof. But this didn't mean to say there wasn't a strong objection to the idea. The main concern was that all the really bad eggs were in one possibly vulnerable basket.

Brackendale prison seemed the most unlikely choice for the conglomeration of evil. A modern, low-security prison with a well-equipped Gym, swimming baths, cinema and fully carpeted cells. The complex was nestled amid beautiful folding countryside, less than a mile away from several peaceful villages each with an infant school. Also, for some bizarre reason, the staffing levels and security were kept to a minimum. In all respects, it appeared to be a calamity waiting to happen. This was where Madeline found herself, rubbing shoulders will all the evilness this country had amassed over the past years. She had a text message…

"Twenty-seven heinous degenerates brought together under one roof. You know what you have to do."

'You've got to be joking!' fumed Madeline – to herself.

What exactly was expected of her, to kill twenty-seven people? Up to now, she had killed a total of five – a distasteful fact that often haunted her in her sleep. However, in many ways, eradicating this lump of festering toxic evil did make sense, she knew this. Humanity was probably best rid of such monsters and besides the cost to the taxpayer for keeping these people locked up for decades was exorbitant. Dropping a bomb on the place was obviously out of the question, innocent people would certainly be killed. There was only one way forward – someone had to pop them off individually. To kill twenty-seven people, this someone, had to have inhuman qualities. Who better than Madeline, who happened not to be human, to carry out the deed?

Firstly, it was only right that she researched all twenty-seven inmates and find out what they were in for. Then and only then would she be prepared to commit proper mass murder.

The research was relatively straightforward, all twenty-seven were well documented for their crimes. They all had one basic thing in common – they were all completely toxic to society. The crimes they had committed were simply repugnant, ranging from mass murder to gross child abuse. Not so many years ago they would all have been hung from a rope, boiled in an electric chair or had a lethal injection, certainly not pampered with cosy cells, Sky TV and gourmet food.

Yes, why not? She would do it!

The extra-wide bed in the generously sized cell was extremely comfortable. She lay on the soft duck down-filled quilt and gazed up at the ceiling. She wondered if the CCTV camera was infringing any human rights.

'Any ideas?' she said out loud.

Nothing came back, clearly, it was her problem. MI7 were keeping their hands clean, they were all human, but she wasn't. 'No point in rushing it,' she thought, however, she did want to get back to Adam sometime soon. She stood up, sank into the thick pile carpet and gazed through the large picture window. Naturally, there were the customary iron bars bolted to the outside walls but they didn't particularly hinder the distant views of the countryside, the local church and the infant school. She didn't doubt that with her explosive motion she could easily smash the glass, bend the bars and escape but what was the point in that? She was on her first mission and she was instructed to kill twenty-seven human beings in whatever fashion she thought best. What a dangerous person she was. She lay back on the comfortable bed and went to sleep.

Morning arrived abruptly with a bell sounding and a clunk of the door automatically unlocking. She decided to get to know the inmates a little before she did the deed. She would study their habits and see if they had anything in common. Naturally, Madeline didn't want any breakfast, a thirteen-amp socket in her cell/room was sufficient. All the same, she decided to mingle in the canteen. She sat next to a large woman, not fat but muscular and tall. Others called her 'Mole-grip' but her real name was Daisy Grunt – probably a very appropriate name. Madeline began a little idle chat with her – a very much, one-way conversation. Eventually, Mole-grip was sufficiently annoyed to demonstrate her namesake by squeezing Madeline's thigh under the table. It was a powerful grip, enough to normally rupture the flesh and

bruise the muscle but Madeline's thigh was different.

'Please get your hand off my thigh,' asked Madeline politely.

'Run a few errands for me and let me have your food and I will,' Mole-grip *grunt*ed.

'No, take your hand off me or I'll have to hurt you,' said delicate-looking Madeline calmly.

The grip intensified. Madeline selected explosive motion level 2 and grabbed hold of Mole-grip's wrist touching her thigh. A few bones cracked and ligaments snapped while Mole grip's scream reverberated around the canteen. Her outburst was largely ignored by the Officers. They didn't want to get involved. Mole-grip usually scared the shit out of everyone she came in contact with, this included the Prison Officers.

'I'm afraid you've been out squeezed,' said Madeline calmly.

'I'm going to kill you,' said Mole-grip wiping a large tear from her eye.

'Well, you're well practised in that aren't you? Killed six poor, innocent teenage girls, didn't you? Was it because they were pretty and you are… not pretty?'

'Who the fuck, are you?' Mole-grip fumed.

'Justice, that's who I am,' said Madeline sternly.

Now she had no doubts. Everyone locked up in this inappropriate hotel deserved everything they were going to get. She certainly wasn't going to go through all the other 26 to assess their merits for death. She knew it would be wise to get a move on, Mole- grip's wrist would shortly be X-rayed and questions would be asked.

The deed could be done with poison in the food, but that would be hit and miss – far too unreliable. Her weapons were highly effective but mainly for individual use. Even her laser would only kill one at a time.

Twenty-seven of the most despicable, backstabbing, murderous lumps of toxic evil you could possibly imagine. Maybe she could use this fact to her advantage.

The basic requirements were: Twenty-five steel cutlery knives, a notepad, a couple of forks and a garlic capsule. Madeline studied the psychiatric reports of the twenty-seven inmates. Normally this information would have been completely inaccessible but she had been given special dispensation to access every known database – because she was… special. As expected, they all, without exception, had a hang-up. Something that if focused on would rile each of them

to the point of insane rage and vengeance. All Madeline had to do was nurture this hang-up by delivering a short note to each inmate in turn. This note would highlight their particular neurosis and would be conveniently signed by another inmate. Madeline was simply going to be the messenger. If she did this right, she could work through all the inmates systematically.

And so, the plan began. Mealtime was ideal. She sat next to the first recipient. Madeline was ready with her explanation if she happened to be asked why she was issued with a conventional steel knife and fork – she was allergic to the plastic variety. Of course, there was an important reason why prison cutlery was always plastic – steel knifes made excellent weapons.

She delivered the first note, it said,

'Your hoar of a bitch mother never loved you - Bent Tooth.'

Predictably, in an instant of blind rage, this particular inmate snatched the steel knife out of Madeline's hand and left the canteen. Within an hour, Bent Tooth was found dead, stabbed several times with a relatively blunt object – most possibly, a steel cutlery knife.

For each of the next 24 meal times, Madeline carried out the same procedure of innocently delivering a note to a fresh inmate, apparently signed by a targeted inmate, pointing out their hang-up in a particularly colourful language. In the fullness of time, a total of 25 metal cutlery knives were snatched off Madeline and used to stab and kill the targeted inmate.

After just over a week, there were only three inmates left alive in the prison, including Madeline. Meal times had become progressively quieter until only two prisoners were left for Madeline to deal with. A slightly different tactic now had to be used. It happened to be breakfast time. Madeline sat next to one of the two remaining inmates known as Dogfish. She gave her the suitably prepared inciting note. Incidentally, this time Madeline was using plastic cutlery, not steel.

'A Problem?' asked Madeline.

'I going to kill her,' said Dogfish as she crumpled up the note.

'Kill who?'

'Mole-grip, the fucking bitch!'

'Why, what's she done?' said Madeline innocently.

'The bitch said she's had my pooches minced.'

'Pooches?' Madeline pretended to be surprised.

‘Yeah, my Staffies.’

‘Oh, your dogs. You’re in for human trafficking, aren’t you?

‘That’s what they fuckin’ say.’

‘One hundred and sixty died in transit, including twenty-nine children, didn’t they?’

‘So what, they were only fuckin’ migrants.’

‘You’re not bothered about the death of a hundred and sixty men, women and children but you’re upset over your dogs!?’

‘My pooches are special!’

Of all the intense evil that Madeline had previously come in contact with, this was by far the most intolerable and distasteful of all. She swallowed as best as androids can and continued with her charade.

‘I completely understand, I’m a dog lover too. Tell you what, I’ve got this garlic capsule, I’ve filled it with rat poison. I was going to use it on Mole-grip for bruising my leg. You give it to her. Tell the bitch it will do her crushed wrist good.’

The inmate snatched the capsule off Madeline and walked over to Mole-grip.

‘What’s fuckin’ that?’ said Mole-grip, almost politely.

‘A garlic capsule. Took it off Stick Insect over there. Thought it would be good for yer wrist,’ said Dogfish.

‘Err, yes… thanks,’ Mole-grip didn’t know what to say, it seemed like an act of kindness and she didn’t know how to deal with that.

The timing was now important. They both watched as Mole-grip tossed the capsule into her mouth and gulped orange juice from the glass. Seconds later, Madeline jumped up from the table and ran over to Mole-grip.

‘Don’t take the capsule, it’s laced,’ screamed Stick Insect (Madeline).

‘Laced?’ boomed Mole-grip.

‘Got rat poison in it! Dogface nicked it off me, was going to use it on the guards,’ whimpered Madeline convincingly.

This time steel cutlery wasn’t required. Within seconds, Mole-grip’s hands were around Dogfish’s neck and she was dead. Moments later Mole-grip was dead too, from the poison contained in the capsule. It wasn’t rat poison but something just as deadly, taken from Madeline’s syringe finger.

‘Twenty-seven dead and not a one by my hands,’ said Madeline out loud to whoever may be listening. In all respects, it was a job well done. Of course, there would be questions asked. For instance, where did the 26 steel cutlery knives and the deadly poison in the capsule come from? Nevertheless, Madeline was innocent, instrumental yes, but completely unblemished. The prison was now empty of inmates. Taxpayers would save umpteen million pounds a year not to mention selling off the building, perhaps to Premier Inn or Travel lodge. There was only one downside, the prison officers were now redundant.

Madeline Bull was exonerated and all charges were dropped. Her first MI7 mission had been completed quicker, neater and with fewer loose ends than anyone in the Ministry could ever have hoped for.

Someone deep in government circles realised that this routine could now be performed all over the world. It was a marketable format. A Madeline Bull would not be required as the notes could be delivered by email or text and steel cutlery surreptitiously deposited in convenient places.

So, beware, all mass murderers, rapists, child abusers and other very evil people. Capital punishment may not return but there are always text messages!

11. An A23 battery

Madeline was finally home again with Adam. Ten long days she had been away from him so she had a lot of catching up to do. She was now officially, a secret agent, which meant she ran a double life. As a consequence, if she ever discussed details about her missions with anyone, they would then have to be killed. Adam naturally wanted to know where'd she been and what she'd been doing. Madeline nicely threatened him with death. He refrained from asking any more questions but he knew exactly where she'd been. He chose to use an alternative approach.

'Have you seen the news? You know all that controversy a few weeks ago about putting all the whole-lifers together in one prison?'

'No, not really,' lied Madeline curtly.

'Well, they ended up all killing each other. Unbelievable don't you think?'

'Unbelievable!'

Someone entirely new and unwelcomed was now listening in, bugging her, violating her. She detested it. This arrangement was not what she signed up for, not that she ever signed anything. Then it was only Turner, she could handle him, even tease him a little. However, the possibility of the whole of MI7 watching and listening in was intolerable. She wondered if she could still shut herself down. She went through the menus displayed in her left eye, found the '*shut down*' command and clicked on it.

'Barton!' Poppy yelled. 'Barton, are you there?'

A couple of minutes went by whilst Barton opened up the communication link directly to her tank.

'I'm here, what's wrong?' said Barton.

The sound of Barton's warm and friendly voice was comforting and settling. He was altogether a father figure and she so wanted to cry in his arms. Barely remembering her real father, she never really discovered the extent of fatherly love but she always suspected she had missed out on something. Naturally, she loved her Mum and

appreciated all the wonderful things she had done for her but often assumed that fathers can offer other qualities to form a well-balanced attitude to life. It would never be right to call him by his first name, not that she could remember what it was. Barton rolled off the tongue, Barton it would always be. Madeline perhaps didn't fully realise it but Barton had a paternal love for both Madeline and Poppy. He had created Madeline, and in every way possible he had adopted Poppy.

'How can I stop them, MI7, listening and watching me? I thought I could cope, I can most of the time but when I'm with Adam, I just want him in my life and no one else.' Poppy was clearly holding back the tears.

'Poppy, Poppy, you are still human after all. Shouldn't be much of a problem, you just need a black spot.'

'How am I going to put my flat in a black spot?'

'You need an 800-Megahertz jammer. I'll post one over to you. Now get back there, you're missing out on valuable Adam time.'

'Okay thanks, Barton, love you.'

A second later she was back with Adam. Madeline reactivated/ wakened to find herself in his arms on the sofa. Unexpectedly but instinctively, she had sent her love to Barton. It had taken a long time, but finally, Madeline realised that she had a father figure and it was Barton. He cared for her, looked after her and devoted his life to her as fathers do. She found it impossible to hold a tear back.

'What's wrong sweetheart?' asked Adam.

'Nothing now,' said Madeline.

The next day a parcel was delivered. It contained the smallest of devices but it lacked a 12-volt battery.

'You want an A23 battery for that. I'll nip down to the shop. I was popping out for a newspaper anyway. I'll only be a few minutes,' said Adam.

In the short time that he was gone a black Range Rover with tinted windows screeched to a halt outside Madeline's flat, picked her up and then catapulted off into the distance.

12. The ‘V’ room

The shiny black 4x4 pulled up at a private airport. An equally shiny black helicopter was waiting with rotors spinning. For once, Madeline felt important, a sleek colossally expensive helicopter just for her. In no time the helicopter had travelled rapidly north to Cheshire and was landing skilfully on a helipad on top of Shawlsdown hall. Pike was waiting to escort her into the building. A lift took them many floors down, far more than the Hall appeared to have from the outside. The lift opened onto a small, well-lit room. Nuttall stood there alone.

‘Thanks, Pike, you can go now.’

Nuttall remained silent until Pike was in the lift and ascending.

‘Sorry Madeline, we need you again, something serious this time,’ said Nuttall, wondering if it was necessary to apologise to an automaton.

‘Terminating twenty-seven people wasn’t serious then?’

‘Brilliant job, by the way… No, that was just a test.’

‘You mean you successfully riled the nation, filled a morgue and emptied a prison just to test me?’

‘You underestimate yourself. You are possibly the greatest asset this country has ever had. We’ve spent billions on nuclear submarines, aircraft carriers and trident, but you can do things on an altogether different platform. Call yourself a gold-plated investment.’

‘Investment? You’ve claimed me because my genius builders have conveniently all gone. You haven’t a clue how I function, what if I go faulty? What if my core program is corrupted?’ raged Madeline.

Apart from anything else, she thought it was wise to reinforce the android deception.

‘We’ll fix you,’ said Nuttall positively.

‘Don’t ever underestimate me!’ said Madeline sternly. ‘What’s my next job then?’

‘First things first, let me tell you a bit about this room: We are thirty metres below the surface. The walls are lead impregnated concrete, two metres thick and we are inside a Faraday’s cage charged with

twenty thousand volts…'

'A fallout shelter,' chirped Madeline. 'Expecting a nuclear attack?'

'Not at the moment. This room is one of a kind, the only one in the world. It's called the 'V' room – V for veil. It's a full spectrum shielded chamber. It was built during the war to keep out anything Hitler came up with.'

'Am I supposed to be impressed?'

'Absolutely nothing can penetrate this room, not even neutrinos.'

How wrong Nuttall was. The complex signal from Professor Braugenhau's radio transmitter was clearly 'getting in'. Madeline continued to communicate perfectly with Poppy's interface many miles away. Fortunately, Nuttall didn't know this. He had no reason to suspect Madeline Bull was anything other than a very cleverly programmed android.

'So, what do you want to be shielded from? Extra-terrestrials?' suggested Madeline glibly.

'…Thought waves,' said Nuttall after a calculated delay.

'You what, thought waves? You're taking the wee-wee!'

'On the contrary, have you ever heard the name, Mark Titoo?'

'Of course, I have, who hasn't?'

'You have? Oh, I was hoping you hadn't… Well, who is he then? How have you heard of him? Where have you seen him?' asked Nuttall.

'He's the… he was on…' Madeline couldn't answer.

'Exactly, everybody in the country has heard of him but nobody knows who he is but his name is familiar as rain.'

'He's a Newsreader?' claimed Madeline.

'No, he isn't.'

'An author?'

'No,'

'So how the hell have I heard of him then?'

'Well, until a moment ago, I thought it was some sort of mind-influencing signal but now it begs the question, how have you been influenced, with a computer processor instead of a brain?'

Madeline, of course, didn't have a brain as such, she just used Poppy's, which, last time she checked was definitely biological. To

circumnavigate this deception, a little white lie was necessary.

‘Actually, a bit of me is biological. My designers had to develop a way of making the many thousands of electrical connections in my processor more dynamic so they used protoplasmic fibres instead,’ said Madeline, not having a clue where the word protoplasmic came from.

‘Well, that explains a lot but we were hoping that you were immune. Can you hear anything?’

‘No nothing, it’s deadly quiet.’

‘Turn your gain up to full. Your new diamond ceramic mikes will pick up any trace of noise.’

Madeline rubbed her finger and thumb together in a particular way.

‘Amazing, I can hear your heartbeat. You want to get that checked out, you have a murmur,’ said Madeline unsympathetically.

‘Tell me about it! I’ve been waiting seven years to see a consultant. Anyway, we digress. Our boffins think it may be some sort of ultrasound. We believe that someone has developed a way of transmitting these mind-influencing signals all over the world. In this room we seem to be shielded from the signal,’ said Nuttall.

‘Yes, we must be,’ Madeline lied.

Strangely enough, she was conscious of a very faint high-pitched tinnitus type sound. However, it was entering Poppy’s ears not Madeline’s, who presumably was not thirty metres underground.

‘If someone has found a way of influencing everyone’s subconscious, remotely, using ultrasound – tinnitus, it’s very worrying. Hatred can be instilled, governments can be overthrown, mass brainwashing…’ suggested Madeline.

‘The human being is a very susceptible entity,’ said Nuttall solemnly.

‘Well, it certainly beats your average mass murderer, rapist, psychopath and extortionist. You want me to track down and kill this Mark Titoo then?’

‘Yes, and quickly before he starts to be a threat. Only you have the resources, the invulnerability and, dare I say it, the ingenuity to do it,’ said Nuttall.

For some reason, Madeline became overwhelmed with emotion and her eyes welled up as he said this.

They left the veiled room and entered the lift. The faint tinnitus noise

returned inside Nuttall's head.

'Odd? I don't know why but suddenly I feel very depressed. I have an overwhelming feeling that everyone despises me,' said Madeline trying her best not to cry.

Nuttall's courteous smile and the friendly glint in his eye suddenly evaporated. Immediately, he began to loathe the android standing beside him. The lift door opened. They were greeted by six angry men wielding handguns. Nuttall felt the urge to join in and took out his handgun and shot Madeline in the chest. Then the others opened fire. The barrage of bullets pierced Madeline's designer clothes but fortunately bounced off her new impervious body. She hastily selected explosive motion level 5 and took off down the corridor at the speed of a Bugatti Veyron. Before she knew it, she was almost flying across the gravel drive and heading like a bullet, for the main gates.

Her suspicions were confirmed. Everyone did appear to hate her, deepening her sudden onset of depression. Tears cascaded down her cheeks as she ran across a ploughed field with ten-metre strides. Then suddenly as quickly as it came, it went. The feeling that everybody hated her, disappeared. A few minutes later, a message came through from Nuttall on her invasive MI7 communication device:

'Sorry about that, but now you know what you're up against. For a few minutes, you were probably the most loathed person on Earth. The hate feeling has now dissipated as quickly as it appeared. You have to find this Mark Titoo or whoever is doing this and do what you're best at.'

Madeline didn't like the idea that killing was what she was best at. Surely there were other things that she was better at than killing. She thought about it and realised that there wasn't. She ran for over four miles across more fields, jumping easily over dry stone walls and streams until eventually, after about five minutes, she reached a small town. The most important item on her shopping list was an A23, 12-volt battery. The appearance of a gorgeous minx peppered in bullet holes didn't go unnoticed in the supermarket. Annoyingly, everyone was overly concerned about her state and uncomfortably friendly. Eventually, after much fuss from the staff and customers, she managed to leave the supermarket. She fitted the small battery into the device she had received in the post that morning and contacted Barton on her internal system.

'Hi Bops, hope your device works,' said Madeline deciding to try out a new name for him.

A troubled voice came back, '*Is the green light on?'*

'Hang on, yes, green light. Are you all right, you sound upset?'

'I am now. Ten minutes ago, for some unknown reason, I started ripping wires and pipes out of your tank in an uncontrollable rage.'

'You hated me, right?'

'Well, yes. The feeling faded before I'd done any real damage but I can't explain it.'

'You weren't alone, something very strange is going on.'

'Fascinating! Strangely though, after a few minutes, my emotions seemed to rebound from extreme hate to extreme…'

'Love?' suggested Madeline.

She didn't give him time to answer. The last thing she wanted was to go all sloppy on each other.

'You weren't alone. Half the staff at Shawlsdown hall were desperate to put bullet holes in me and then a moment ago in the supermarket, everyone tried to smother me with affection. Have you heard the name Mark Titoo? Don't bother answering, you have but you haven't a clue who he is. Apparently, we're all being influenced by some kind of imperceptible mind-controlling sound. It seems that I'm more significant than I thought. This sound, whatever, has just made everyone in the country, perhaps in the world, hate me for a few minutes.'

'Incredible! This Titoo chap is your next target, then?'

'If he's behind all this, yes. After recent events, I suspect a few obstacles may well be placed in my way. I could do with some leads.'

'Don't forget your databases, they may reveal something?'

'Good thinking, I think I'll hide in a pub somewhere and journey inattentively inwards.'

'Journey inattentively inwards – good line.'

'Yeah, read it in a book. Would you contact Adam and ask him to come and pick me up? I could run the whole 200 miles but I may attract unwelcomed attention.'

'OK, will do… Madeline, please be careful,' said Barton, clearly recovering from his recent emotional experience.

13. Everyone loves Madeline

Two significant factors were now apparent: The ability of this brainwashing ultrasound to target an individual and the name, Mark Titoo who no one knew but everyone had heard of. Whoever sent the brainwashing signal to hate Madeline, seemed to know exactly when it would have the most impact. If it was this so-called Mark Titoo, undoubtedly, he was aware that he was her next target. An inside man was the only possible answer.

There was a slim chance. It all depended on whether Paul Brownsword, AKA Turner, had diligently completed his paperwork duties before he was killed. Had he found time to file the names on the Residents of Wardate list (a list of the most reviled, evil people on the planet) onto a special database? She typed in the word "Wardate" and crossed her fingers. It wasn't there, of course, it wasn't. A database containing the world's most evil people? That would be something instantly deleted by a strategically placed member of the brotherhood. But surely Turner/Brownsword wouldn't have discarded the priceless information. Would he have filed the names under something else? Madeline entered *"Brownsword"* – nothing, *"Turner"* – nothing, *"Tara Gogli"* – nothing. Madeline emerged from her inner world, left the quiet corner of the inn and went over to the bar.

'Have you a double room vacant?' asked Madeline.

'Yes Madam, one night?' said the rather miserable obese barman.

'Yes.'

'Do you want to see it?'

'No, I'm sure it'll be fine.'

'Can I have your name please?'

'Madeline Bull.'

The sheer mention of her name transformed the barman's expression. A penetrating paternal smile radiated from his former sad face.

'*The* Madeline Bull?'

'Why, do you know me?'

The barman had to think about that question. He obviously didn't but somehow, he adored her, trembled in her presence and would walk to the moon and back for her. He had no idea why he felt like he did. A rather long uncomfortable silence ensued before Madeline thanked him and returned to her seat. The next couple of hours were insufferable for Madeline in the nicest possible way. Naturally, the Barman told every visitor to the inn that *the* Madeline Bull was sitting in the corner. None of the visitors had ever set eyes on her but for some unfathomable reason, they all adored her. When she was Poppy, popularity was something she always craved, but now, as Madeline, she had moved on from this shallowness and often preferred solitude. Making everyone loathe her for a few minutes appeared to be followed by everyone then flipping into some kind of worship mode for a lot longer.

Adam arrived with tears streaming down his face. He ran to Madeline, hugged her, kissed her and cried some more.

'Adam, sweetheart, what's wrong,' asked Madeline sweetly. A man crying always hit her weak spot.

'A few hours ago, something really weird happened. In an instant I detested you. So much so that I tore up all our photos, that favourite shirt you bought me, I cut it up. I started to send you a hate text and then, suddenly, it was all over. I loved you again. I don't think I've ever realised how much I do love you.'

'It will pass, I think?'

'What do you mean, pass? Why would I want this feeling to stop?'

'Listen, I know this is hard to believe but you've been influenced by some kind of mind brainwashing signal. You're not the only one who's been affected. Even Barton was emotional. Look around, everybody is stalking me. They all apparently, adore me. It's nice, I suppose, but something I could do without.'

Madeline told Adam everything: The mysterious man's name, Mark Titoo, who naturally he had heard of. The tinnitus ultrasound signal. The fifteen bullet holes in her clothes and how she ran for four miles in five minutes. Eventually after four pints of Guinness and one untouched red wine she told him about the double room she had booked. Fortunately, by now, the strange adoration had worn off. No longer was anyone in the inn, gawping, stalking or ogling at her anymore and Adam had reverted to his old carefree, chilled-out self, he still loved her though.

The next morning Adam was pretty much worn out by Madeline's insatiable appetite for rumpy-pumpy. He desperately required a large

full English breakfast to aid in his recovery. She decided to stay in the room, plugged into a thirteen-amp socket, whilst Adam gorged on his bacon, eggs, tomato, beans, sausage and hash browns. Sometimes passionate sex is good to get the brain motivated, she thought. First, she made sure that the green light was glowing, on her little jamming device. Then, rubbing her thumb and forefinger together in a particular way, she typed in Hogarth hospital followed by residents of Ward 8. Instantly, in her internal view was the full list of names she had glanced at on Gogli's computer screen – *the Residents of Wardate*. Top of the list was Aaron Alexander, the one who was responsible for poaching her like an egg in a saucepan. Now it was a simple matter of cross-matching this list with the employees at Shawlsdown Hall and possibly finding a mole. She accepted that this was a long shot. Perhaps the insider wasn't a resident of Wardate. Perhaps there wasn't an insider at all. Conveniently, Nuttall's team of scientists had repaired her big toe; she hinged open the end of it and inserted a memory stick.

The jamming device was turning out to be a godsend, being more on than off. Apart from hiding databases from prying eyes, it had other uses. Naturally, it was on whilst they were making love, whilst she was naked, whilst Adam was naked and when she had something for Adam's ears only. Now she switched it off, she had to speak to Nuttall.

'Nuttall, can you hear me? I'm sending Adam to Shawlsdown. He has information on a memory stick, I need you to check out.'

Several seconds passed before Nuttall replied.

'Shall I send the helicopter?'

'Why not, then I can use his car!'

Finally, Madeline was back in the Volvo. She simply loved Adam's car. Many things, good and bad had happened on the soft leather seats. It was sort of home from home. It had character but above all it was dependable. She needed to visit someone – the cleverest person she knew. Perhaps cleverer than all the P.A.I.D. scientists put together (the scientists who built Madeline Bull). His address was top secret, consequently, it was easy to find on a top-secret database.

Adam had never been in a helicopter before. He couldn't entirely cherish the moment because he had a serious job to do. He knew the information contained on the memory stick, he carried, was highly confidential. Only Nuttall was to see the contents and even then, only viewed in his 'V' room. He was well aware that helping his girlfriend was nearly always hazardous and there was always a possibility that he would end up with at least one bullet somewhere in his body, but

he was prepared to take the risk. Very quickly, the flight was over and the sleek black helicopter descended onto the compact helipad at Shawlsdown Hall. No cock-ups this time, he had to get this right. As usual, Pike met him on the helipad.

'I need to see Nuttall urgently,' yelled Adam assertively, over the noise of the engine – his hair whipping about in the wake of the rotors.

Perhaps he shouldn't have been so brazen, perhaps he shouldn't have drawn so much attention to himself and perhaps he shouldn't have been wearing dark sunglasses. It *was* raining after all. Pike delegated one of the staff to take him to Nuttall. He soon found himself in a small room in an isolated wing of Shawlsdown Hall, behind a heavy soundproofed door.

'Why does this always happen to me!' screamed Adam.

14. A drive to Digg

It was a long drive but Madeline didn't mind at all. The scenery was digitally stunning, the Volvo purred along and the radio played relaxing classical music. She had never heard of Digg but it was on a Scottish island that she had heard of – The Isle of Sky and that's where she was heading. It was in this extremely isolated place that Sam Johnson, a brand-new name provided by the government protection scheme, now resided. In accordance with this protection scheme, his new identity remained highly classified, on a top-secret database – a database to which Madeline was privileged to have full access.

Professor Braugenhau was a truly brilliant scientist but unfortunately, extreme genius can generate its own problems. It started well: The Professor's unique communication system was used to connect Poppy Cock to Madeline Bull. The system's special radio waves could pass through matter, unhindered, dispensing with costly, unreliable, communication satellites with inconvenient signal delays. However, the system had one significant limitation – it could only have one exclusive user. This was perfectly fine until Raymond de Par, the biological extortionist, extorted the same system to operate his worldwide lethal devices. The upshot of this infraction was that Madeline's connection with Poppy was occasionally disrupted. However, more critically, Madeline's signal almost disrupted the lethal devices narrowly avoiding a worldwide catastrophe.

De Par was the first to extort the system from the Professor. Since then, numerous parties throughout the world had designs on the system. Naturally, they were out of luck as it was already in use by a very feisty android. Paul Brownsword signed the papers and the protection scheme was initiated.

And so began the life of Sam Johnson.

It was early evening when Madeline entered the peaceful sparsely populated village. No shops, garages or schools, just a handful of pastel-coloured houses scattered about the hillside, gave this isolated part of Scotland the right to call itself a village. It was raining, naturally, but it was peaceful rain, pattering gently on the roof of the Volvo. In some ways, she was looking forward to meeting the person who had made her new self, possible. True, the other four scientists

had certainly played their part but without the radio link, she couldn't possibly function. Was he old and jolly? Was he bald with a long white unkempt beard? 'No, that was Santa Claus,' she thought. She knocked on the door.

It took an age for the door to finally open. A scruffy, middle-aged woman hovered in the entrance. The odours that were surely there, were undetected by Madeline. Fortunately, she had no sense of smell but the filthy blouse and stained skirt danced out at her.

'Is Mr Johnson in?' asked Madeline. 'Can I come in? I'm getting a bit wet out here.'

'No, piss off!' growled the scruffy, grumpy old woman.

'Would you be kind enough to tell him that it's Madeline Bull?'

'My God!' gasped the old woman.

Her eyes lit up and a huge smile broke across her face.

'Come in, come in. I have to be wary on my own out here.'

The interior of the house was as expected, untidy but spacious and certainly welcoming. Not modern but kitted out with all the mod-cons. It was a modestly sized room with the kitchen area at one end and what could be classed as a lounge forming the rest of the living space. A blazing log fire, more than adequately warmed the room.

'Sit down, please sit down. I know you don't have to, but please…'

Madeline dusted some crumbs off a chair and sat down.

'No point in offering you a cup of tea but I've got a thirteen-amp socket if that's any use.'

'No, no thanks… How do you…?'

'You don't know how thrilled I am to see you. When they told me what my system would be used for, I was delighted. And you're so…'

'Gorgeous?'

'Yes, everything I imagined you would be.'

'*Your* system? But you're a woman?'

'Well, I was last time I checked. Now, you're not bugged or tracked, are you?'

'No, I've got this jamming device.'

Madeline took the little box out of her pocket and checked that the green light was still glowing.

‘Barton’s with us but he’s trustworthy,’ said Madeline.

‘Professor Barton? Well, well, how is the old codger?’

‘Tell her I’m fine. Ask her, how’s the old frump?’ replied Barton through Madeline’s audio circuits.

‘He’s fine, he’s asking how’s the old frump?’

Sam laughed heartily but wisely didn’t give a reply.

‘He’s like a father, he looks after me,’ said Madeline proudly.

Samantha Johnson formerly Professor Braugenhau came across as a lovely warm accommodating person. Madeline Instantly bonded and felt at ease in her company. She told the Professor everything, even though much of it she already knew: How Poppy died and Madeline was born, her adventures, her upgrades, all about Adam, all about Barton, all about her latest missions and then more about Adam. They talked for hours and eventually moved on to the subject of Ray de Par.

‘I had two sons. I wouldn’t, couldn’t cooperate with him… My youngest, Jay, got a parcel.’

Madeline knew instantly what she was leading to.

‘I’m so, so sorry,’ said Madeline holding her hand.

‘Your hand? It’s warm and soft and… perfect,’ said the professor trying her best to move away from the subject, but she knew she had to finish.

‘I had no choice, I couldn’t lose Danny, my eldest, to the same fate.’

‘No, no, anyone would have done the same,’ reassured Madeline.

‘Anyway, my lovely Madeline, you sorted him out, you did well.’

The odd tear was now flowing down the professor’s face washing off some of the designer dirt.

‘I assume this isn’t a social visit, you’re here for a reason. What do you want to know?’ asked the Professor in a more professional tone.

‘I really did want to meet you but you’re right, I’ve come to pick your brains. Have you heard the name, Mark Titoo?’

‘Of course, I have, he’s… he’s an… MP, no, an actor, isn’t he?’

‘I thought if anyone knew him, it would be you but obviously you don’t know him, do you?’

‘I’m sure I do. I know, he’s a newsreader,’ suggested the Professor.

‘No… Apparently, no one knows who he is but everybody has heard of

him. There's an ultrasound signal that's being transmitted from somewhere and it's brainwashing all of us. You don't know anyone who was developing or researching something similar to that in your line of work – thought control, whatever you want to call it?'

'It was back in the '90s at Cambridge. There was a group of us specialising in radio communication and electronics. We were trying to find a new unique way of communication. That's a photo of us behind you.'

Madeline picked up the photo frame. A group of six cheery men and women posed for the camera. Professor Braugenhau could easily be identified third from the left. She was undoubtedly a woman, pretty, well dressed and not a hint of grime on her face.

'At the time, *they* were worried that all the electromagnetic spectrum would be shortly used up with such things as radio, television, mobile phones, etcetera. They wanted the impossible. They wanted us to find a new spectrum I suppose. As usual, a little bit of knowledge is a dangerous thing especially if you're a narrow-minded minister. However, we did come up with quite a few ideas as you know.'

'Do you know the names of your group?'

'Now you're asking. We all tended to call each other by nicknames: Faggy, Carpy… oh yes, Coco. I was called Eyebrow, for obvious reasons.'

Madeline stored the picture in her internal gallery files.

'Was anyone dabbling in… something like a biological spectrum?' asked Madeline trying to be intelligent.

'Biological, an interesting notion. I wouldn't think so. That's not to say that almost everything was considered: bioelectronics, neutrinos, gravity waves and yes, even ultrasound but I can't remember who was concentrating on what. We tended not to pry on one another's work,' said the Professor.

Madeline listened intently to the friendly old lady but a flashing light in the corner of her vision distracted her. It was her jamming device. The indicator was no longer green but flashing red. Exactly how long this had been the case, she wasn't sure. The battery was quickly replaced by a fresh one but it was too late, the level of tinnitus built up in *Poppy's* head until it was no longer subliminal.

'Shit! I'm so sorry. Here, hold my hand tightly. On no account let my thumb and forefinger touch. If you want to live, don't let me go no matter what,' said Madeline sternly.

The Professor did as she was told, she provided a powerful grip.

‘Why, what’s happening?’

‘I believe you are about to experience the effects of the ultrasound.’

‘Strange, I feel suddenly depressed – a horrible wave of despair.’

‘So you should, you obnoxious, foul evil-smelling bastard!’ scream Madeline.

‘What’s going on?’ cried the Professor.

‘Let go of my hand, the world is better off without your sort,’ snarled Madeline.

The grip tightened. Madeline with explosive motion turned off, had the strength of at least one man but the power of the Professor’s grip was enhanced with fear and adrenalin.

‘How surreal. The feeling is a flood of negative emotions. I want you to end my life,’ said the professor, analysing the situation.

‘Well, let me do it you evil hoar. Let go of my hand,’ growled Madeline.

‘No, I won’t!’ said the professor resolutely.

‘*Kill her!*’ shouted Barton through Madeline’s audio system.

For the next couple of minutes, Madeline tried to wriggle out of the grip so she could activate her laser weapon with her thumb and forefinger but the professor held on tightly. Madeline invented a whole set of new words to insult and offend the professor. Tears rolled down the Professor’s face but she still was thinking rationally unlike Madeline. She decided she didn’t want to die today.

Finally, the level of tinnitus died down and then disappeared. The ordeal was over.

Madeline burst into tears. She hugged the professor and kissed her cheek, despite the grime. She was completely inconsolable.

This rebound effect lasted for almost half an hour. Eventually, the tears dried up and the whole affair was pretty much put down to experience.

‘Impressive, eh? You’ve just encountered the dramatic effect of this ultrasound signal,’ said Madeline.

‘Remarkable, ingenious, but completely out of order,’ said the professor giving a fair and well-balanced assessment.

‘You do realise you’re assumed to be dead now. Until I track down

who's behind all this and do what I'm getting pretty good at, you'll have to keep your head down. No answering the door to any strangers. I really am sorry I've got you involved,' said Madeline.

'Couldn't be helped, you have a job to do. Please, stay tonight. I have a spare bed. I know what you're thinking but it's clean. You do realise this grime and my stained clothes are all for effect. I'm clean underneath, honest!'

'That's kind of you, I will, thanks, but first I have to go for a little walk and give someone a piece of my mind.'

'I understand,' said the Professor.

Madeline walked for a few hundred yards until she came to the cliff edge with a pebbled cove below. It was a blissfully peaceful evening, the sun was dipping delicately on the sea, seagulls swooped by and the long grasses swayed energetically in the fresh playful wind. Although she didn't particularly feel the cold, she experienced the breeze in her hair, it was invigorating. The overexposure of her optics triggered built-in Polaroid filters. She could now watch the perfect sunset. It was a wonderful place to live. Perhaps one day in the distant future, she would settle down here with Adam and do her utmost to get old together.

She turned off the little jamming device.

'Nuttall!'

As usual, a short time passed before he returned her call.

'Madeline, are you okay? We keep losing connection.'

'I'm fine but a lady called Samantha Johnson is dead. I sliced her with my laser,' lied Madeline.

'*We all wanted her dead for a while.'*

'Nuttall, am I on loudspeaker?'

'Yes, why is that a problem?'

'For god's sake, turn it off!'

'…Okay, it's off.'

'Finally… Don't you realise you've got a traitor in the camp? Haven't you noticed? Someone is always one step ahead. Someone knew where I was and initiated the subliminal message to hate Samantha Johnson. Have you examined the data I sent with Adam yet?'

'Adam? Haven't seen him.'

‘For goodness’ sake, what kind of ministry of intelligence are you? The last time I spoke, he was on his way to you in *your* helicopter. I assume it was your helicopter?’

‘Right, right, leave it with us, I’ll get someone to go over the CCTV footage.’

‘No, please… do it yourself, the traitor could be anyone. For some unfathomable reason, you’re the only one there that I trust.’

‘Don’t worry, we’ll find him.’

Nuttall, if you want me to find this Mark Titoo, I need a bit of professionalism.’

‘Okay, okay, point taken,’ replied Nuttall.

There was no denying that Madeline was revelling in the moment. Nuttall had been a demanding bully and cruelly unyielding but now, in Madeline’s eyes, he was properly put in his place.

She was now beginning to realise that it was *her* mission, which meant she would have to do it all. After all, she was a one-woman army.

She turned the jamming device back on.

15. Coley, polite to the end

The return journey was somewhat of an anti-climax. As soon as the beautiful Scottish islands disappeared in the rear-view mirror, the grey monotonous motorway appeared in front of her. She wondered if the trip had been worth it. The Professor almost got killed by her hand and now she was unofficially dead. Clearly, the answer was no. The other people: the scientists and professors who worked with her all those years ago didn't provide any leads, but there was something. Two innocent pieces of information that meant nothing on their own but when joined together meant an awful lot. Madeline wasn't aware of this although she had a feeling she had missed something important. Unfortunately, her human brain was insufficient to process all the data of her recent encounter, correlate the facts and come up with a lead as would a real robot.

'Barton, how am… are things?'

'You'll live, if that's what you were about to ask.'

'I could do with being screened from this pesky ultrasound, any ideas? That 'V' room seemed to be effective. What do you think it was keeping it out, the lead, the thick concrete or the high voltage?'

'If it's just straightforward ultrasound, it's probably just being absorbed by the earth. How far down is this 'V' room?'

'About thirty metres.'

'There you are then, takes a lot to get through thirty metres of soil, clay and rock.'

'Any chance of putting thirty metres of soil around my tank?'

'I'll see what I can do, leave it to me.'

'You're a star, love you, Bops.'

She did it again. It was becoming habitual although not in any way false. She always *used to* put "love" on the end of her text messages to her mother and closest friends, that was perfectly fine. Barton would just have to accept it, he was Bops, like a father to her and that was that.

Madeline had pointed out the obvious. Apparently, there was a traitor

in MI7. Someone was working for the enemy and very close to Nuttall.

Rarely was there a need to examine the footage or even watch the cameras, therefore, the CCTV room, for most of the time, was unmanned.

'Going for a coffee,' said Nuttall hoping he wouldn't be accompanied.

Never before had he had to slink around in his own workplace, but anyone could be the traitor. Eventually, he reached the CCTV room, went in and locked the door behind him. He examined the previous day's footage: the morning was selected. Eventually, the footage of the helicopter landing was displayed. He watched Pike greeting Adam and then Pike delegating someone with his back to the camera, to escort Adam.

'Who the hell is that,' said Nuttall quietly.

He followed the camera shots to the far west wing of the building and watched Adam being forced into a room. Finally, the person turned around to face the camera.

'Well, well, well, Chris Coley. Who would have thought,' said Nuttall.

A few seconds later there was a knock at the door. Nuttall turned off the monitor and unlocked the door.

A tall young man with shoulder-length dark hair walked in. It happened to be Chris Coley.

'Oh, hello Sir, didn't expect to find you in here,' said Coley somewhat surprised.

'Why, who did you expect to see in here?' asked Nuttall.

'Er, no one. Just popped in to check that the surveillance equipment is running OK.' said Coley nervously.

'Popped in to erase some of yesterday's video footage, you mean,' said Nuttall.

'Sorry, not following you sir?' said Coley.

'Oh, I think you do.'

Coley instinctively reached inside his jacket but Nuttall was way ready and prepared. Before Coley could react, Nuttall had fired a lethal bullet into his chest.

'Well, that solves that particular problem!' said Nuttall callously.

Nuttall made no attempt to clean up after him but took a moment to delete the video footage from the previous day before he left the CCTV

room.

The safest place in Shawlsdown hall was the ‘V’ room but Adam’s first port of call was the canteen. He hadn’t eaten or drunk anything for over a day. Despite yelling, shouting and screaming, no one had heard him. No one ever ventured down the far end of the west wing. He could have been there for months, undiscovered. Of course, by then he would have been all skin and bone and dead. As it happened though, Coley had purposely left the door unlocked. He could have left the room whenever he wanted to – but Adam never thought to try the door, he assumed he was a prisoner.

It seemed that Nuttall had exposed his traitor. Coley was made an example of and mercilessly killed. Nuttall clearly would not stand for any insubordination.

The canteen seemed like a perfectly safe place to examine the data on the memory stick but first, Adam chomped through a large English breakfast. Despite Coley apparently being the MI7 traitor, his name didn’t appear on the Residents of Wardate list. Of course, it didn’t.

Coley’s life had ended abruptly. He had impeccable credentials and came to MI7 with a glowing reference from Paul Brownsword of all people. He gained a first-class honours degree at Oxford and in his time had played hooker for the Harlequins. Sadly, he left a wife and two young daughters behind. Despite this, he was denied a proper funeral.

Nuttall ordered his staff to search his belonging. They found an empty small tin box. It was lined with black felt and had two small indents. Small traces of earwax were a clear indication of what was missing. Inside Coley’s ears were tiny devices akin to hearing aids. No one would have seen them as his long hair covered his ears up. There was no doubt that the function of these devices was to cancel out the ultrasound. The devices were sent to the lab. They also examined his Mobile phone. No gun was found on his person, just a surveillance equipment check sheet in his inside jacket pocket.

Madeline’s first stop after her long journey was Shawlsdown Hall. More than anything, she wanted to see Adam. Pike met her at the entrance and escorted her to Nuttall. Adam was by Nuttall’s side in his office. She checked that Adam had been well treated, well-fed and had no visible or discrete bullet wounds before she turned to Nuttall.

‘Well, have you got anywhere? The traitor problem?’ snapped Madeline.

‘It was Coley, one of my best men. I still can’t believe it. The boys in the lab are examining a couple of devices he had in his ears. Their purpose may be to mask the ultrasound. Have *you* achieved anything, apart from killing Professor Braugenhau?’

Madeline stalled in her tracks. She had never mentioned the name Professor Braugenhau or that she was going to visit her. Nuttall obviously knew far more than he was letting on.

‘She was a lovely lady and if you had your own house in order, it wouldn’t have happened,’ Madeline scorned.

Madeline, once again, attempted to put Nuttall in his place. Adam nodded his head with approval.

‘I can’t believe I got locked away under your noses,’ said Adam.

‘Well, all that’s behind us now. We’re investigating one or two leads from Coley’s phone,’ said Nuttall.

‘Leave it to you then, we’ll go back to the inn,’ said Madeline.

‘Before you go, we seem to be having trouble with the monitoring system we installed in you. It must be the graphene lattice under your skin interfering with the signal.’ Nuttall reached into his desk drawer. ‘This is the very latest, state-of-the-art, smart satellite phone wristwatch, not available to the general public – sixty grands’ worth. Wear it and don’t lose it!’

‘Wow real James Bond stuff!’ said Adam excitedly.

‘James who?’ enquired Nuttall.

16. The hate begins

Throughout the world, it began.

Virtually imperceptible, a very high-pitched noise influencing everyone on earth. Only when it was peacefully quiet was there a chance of hearing it and then, it had to be pointed out. The hidden message in this faint hissy noise had to be deciphered. Only the subconscious mind could do this. Not irritating, not invasive, not unpleasant, unnoticed by most – this was ultrasound.

Madeline and Adam were left alone for many days. They knew it couldn't last but they made the most of their time together. They could have journeyed back down south to familiar territory but Cheshire was pleasant and picturesque and the Inn was welcoming. Every evening in the snug, Adam would have his pint and Madeline her gin and tonic – through a straw in her tank. It was almost, just the same. Now used to her unique situation, life went on. She knew no different. Well, actually, she did.

She now felt well and strong. Drugs were no longer in her veins. Barton had mended her, made her well and was caring for her. On top of all this, he had moved her real body to an undisclosed location. She knew full well that Barton couldn't spend every minute of the day with her other self, he had a wife and family and possibly a job, but somehow, he always seemed to be there when Madeline needed him.

Their conversation never dried up, Madeline always had much to talk about and Adam loved to listen.

'What's been the best bit up to now as the new you?' asked Adam.

'My trip to the Isle of Sky. When this mission is over.'

'Isle of Skye?' queried Adam.

'I'd like to go back there. It's a wonderful place.'

'OK, it's a deal. So, what's been the worst?'

'Don't even have to think about it. My godawful time in America. A horrible place, horrible people. It wants wiping off the face of the planet.'

‘I agree, we should all get together and finish them off,’ said Adam with clear rage.

‘Another pint?’ encouraged Madeline.

‘No, had two already. That’s a point; I can’t tell how much you’ve had.’

‘Only had enough to make me mildly tipsy and loose-limbed,’ said Madeline slightly slurring her words.

At that moment an American couple approached the bar and asked for a room.

‘No rooms available,’ said the barman.

‘But, your sign says you have vacancies. We’ll take anything,’ said the American man.

‘I said… no rooms available. Don’t your sort understand English?’ said the barman belligerently.

The Americans left without a fuss. Several of the clientele including Adam and Madeline cheered and clapped in unison.

‘Come on then, let’s go up, I’m developing a third leg,’ said Adam.

‘Better get that fixed then,’ said Madeline saucily.

Both were completely oblivious to the conditioning going on between their ears.

It had started.

Drip by drip, faintly, the ultrasound was doing its worst. No one realised it, no one suspected that they were being brainwashed in the most subliminal way possible. The whole world was being influenced. Even the Americans began to loathe themselves. No one stopped to ask themselves why they hated the USA and hated the American people, they just did. It was impossible to oppose the negative thoughts. Hate felt good. Even the clergy joined in with sermons stirring up the revulsion of the land on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean.

As days went by, the negative feelings continued to build. Americans became the vermin of the world. Those once allies of the USA were now extremists in their views. Everything North American was tainted. People stopped using their computers as they were all contaminated with Apple or Microsoft. MacDonald’s restaurants were

boycotted. Young children would rather eat broccoli than have a happy meal. No one watched The Simpsons anymore and anyone with the slightest American accent was stoned in the streets. No one cared to ask why this was happening, it was just the right way to feel.

There had been no contact from Nuttall for nearly a month. Not that Madeline was complaining, but she was desperate to try out her new £60,000 watch. At random, she pressed a few buttons on it.

'Nuttall, can you hear me?' yelled Madeline into the device.

Several minutes went by before there was a reply.

'Hi Madeline, almost forgotten about you.'

'Got anywhere with Mark Titoo?'

'He's on the back burner. All seems to have gone quiet now. At the moment, we're more taken up with the bastards on the other side of the Ocean.'

'Send me over there. Could do with a bit of laser practice,' said Madeline enthusiastically.

'May take you up on that.'

'Did you manage to duplicate Coley's ear devices?' asked Madeline.

'Ear devices? Oh those, no, been sidetracked as you can appreciate.'

This was all so strange, but Madeline couldn't see it, nor could anyone else.

The first nations to form a treaty against the USA were predictably China and Russia; Asia and Japan then followed suit. All of Europe put aside any differences and united against a common cause. Even North and South Korea temporarily united against the despised USA. The countries of South America joined forces with Australia and New Zealand and everything in between. Eventually, in a historical event, all non-USA world countries joined a common cause – to wipe North America off the face of the planet.

It was going to be a grossly one-sided affair. The USA only had a thirteenth of the world's population, but everyone knew their capabilities. As it happened, this wasn't an issue. The people of the USA now loathed themselves. For some unknown reason, they felt despondent, hated themselves and many were chronically depressed. The suicide rate soared. Of course, they hadn't particularly done anything to justify this worldwide hatred and hadn't done anything to be ashamed of or sad about.

The people of the USA didn't want to fight back, they had no wish to.

However, reluctantly they knew they had to do the expected thing even though they would never make the first move. Even then they would only make a move if a sufficient number of nuclear weapons were heading their way.

The rest of the world didn't particularly want Armageddon so they planned an old-style invasion.

It was decided that an armada would be assembled on a scale never seen before. Thousands of ships from every known part of the non-American world were stocked with weapons and the best fighting men. Once ready, all would set sail to arrive simultaneously and beat the crap out of the heinous aberrations that occupied the filthy landmass on the northern hemisphere.

17. Adam on a garden seat

What was unusual about this new imminent world war was that everyone (apart from the Americans) was excited, high spirited and almost looking forward to the bloodshed. It certainly wasn't rational behaviour. The whole world was possessed by illogical objectives and intense hatred. Everyone, including Madeline, was completely under the spell.

'Madeline, Barton here.'

'Hello, you've been quiet,' said Madeline affectionately.

'Been busy. Thought I'd let you know I've installed a noise-cancelling audio bandpass filter.'

'I'd forgotten all about that. You shouldn't have bothered. I think that problem has paled into insignificance,' said Madeline.

'Anyway, I've done it now. It'll screen out all the ultrasound in this room and on your hearing circuits. I'm connecting it up… now.' Barton threw a switch. *'Any weird effects let me know.'*

'OK, will do,' said Madeline with indifference.

'Barton?' said Adam.

'Yes, he's a treasure. Apparently, I'm now surrounded by a noise channelling auto rock band filler,' said Madeline with perhaps too many gin and tonics in her system.

'Sounds far too technical for me,' said Adam who had also overindulged in the inn's warm beer.

Both had more or less claimed the snug area of the inn for themselves. They absorbed the relaxing atmosphere and were now on first-name terms with the barman. Evenings passed quickly, joining in with the regular darts match and skittles league. On the wall behind them, the television had the news channel permanently on. The sound was turned off but the subtitles were displayed. No longer ordinary, topical 'News' material filled the sixty-inch screen, preparations for the invasion had long since taken over. At that instance, the screen was displaying the port of Hong Kong where the Chinese were loading an

impressive array of war machines onto a warship.

‘You never did tell me about your trip to Warsaw.’

‘Lovely place, lovely people,’ said Adam.

‘How did you come to that conclusion, you spent most of your time locked up, didn’t you?’

‘Barton’s been talking, hasn’t he? Snitch!’

‘Barton, he’s called you a snitch,’ said Madeline.

‘Damn site nicer than anywhere in the USA anyway,’ said Adam.

‘Oh, come on! What about Seattle or Atlanta or San Francisco? Beautiful places,’ said Madeline defensively.

Adam was expecting Madeline to completely agree with him but she didn’t. She broke the cardinal rule and praised something American. This was unforgivable, even for his girlfriend. Madeline didn’t realise it but the effect of the subliminal brainwashing was quickly wearing off. A pin dropped in the far corner of the inn. It seemed that everybody had heard her blaspheme. A scene from the *Bodysnatchers* came to mind, everyone’s expression including Adam’s was the same. Time almost stood still as the penetrating hatred stares eroded her spirit. If anyone happened to be armed, they would have opened fire on her without a second thought. If anyone happened to have a pit bull terrier with them, it would now be trying to feed on flesh that she didn’t possess. Madeline quickly realised what was happening. She had suddenly emerged from her hypnotic state. She glanced at the TV on the wall; immediately she knew Mark Titoo was at the root of all this. She remembered the uncontrollable rage at Shawlsdown hall when it was her, not the Americans being loathed. There was only one way out of this awkward moment.

‘Only joking! A little bit of sarcasm, what do you take me for?’ she said slightly trembling.

It took a few seconds for the heightened mood to dissipate and then everyone resumed what they were doing as though the incident never happened.

‘What was that about?’ asked Adam sternly.

‘I was joking, that’s all,’ said Madeline still visibly trembling.

For the first time, Adam scared her – everybody scared her. He was completely under the spell, as *she* had been a few minutes ago. The whole world was under the same powerful terrifying spell. Madeline continued to accurately simulate Poppy’s tremble in her tank. She

could fight a small army with her incredible new body but not the whole world. There was something she had to do.

It was a while since she'd used her gift of flatulence. The gas was only intended for Adam, therefore, only a small amount was administered. Adam slumped over onto his pint. She took Adam's mobile phone out of his pocket and called Barton.

'Hi Bops, I have a question: what's your take on the Americans?' she asked, speaking quietly into Adam's mobile and trying not to arouse suspicion.

'Strange, really strange. My opinion of them has certainly changed if that's what you mean.'

'How the hell has this happened?'

'I think we're in a frightening situation, and no one but us realises it.'

'You do realise the consequences of leaving that room we're both in?'

'I have no intention of going anywhere. I'll just wait for Madeline Bull to resolve the matter.'

'No pressure then!' said Madeline.

Madeline Bull was in demand and back at work even though the rest of the world didn't know it, yet. One thing she couldn't bear was being deceitful with Adam. The priority was to sort that problem out first.

'Could you help me carry him outside for a bit of fresh air? Looks like he's had a bit too much to drink,' Madeline asked the barman.

'Sure love. What's up, can't he take his drink?'

'He's on antibiotics. Shouldn't really have been drinking at all,' Madeline lied.

Madeline could easily have carried Adam for miles, but she thought it best to remain discreet with her unusual abilities.

The barman eased him onto a garden seat.

'Thanks, he'll be alright in a few minutes.'

'Give me a shout if you want me to carry him upstairs,' said the friendly barman.

It was all very strange, as though having a purposeful common hatred had made everyone far nicer to each other. This was a fact: Terrorism, fascism, racism, sexism and all other ism's had all but disappeared. Wars had stopped as had slavery, human trafficking, shoplifting,

burglaries, murder, and rape. All personal differences had been set aside, everyone was extremely courteous, helpful, and kind to one other. Every person's hate and negativity were now directed solely toward the North Americans. On reflection, if this brainwashing was directed at something unearthly – Martians or Venusians, for example, instead of the Americans, the world would be a wonderful place. On a downside, all the world's natural resources would be used up in building a fleet of heavily armed spaceships. Perhaps, not such a good idea.

Madeline had no intention of returning to her room, she had to get to Shawlsdown hall. She spoke into her watch.

'Nuttall, I need to see you urgently.'

'Can't it wait?'

'I've uncovered a British faction supporting the USA,' said Madeline.

She knew only one subject matter would get the required attention. What she said was certainly true although for now, the faction only amounted to two people.

'I'll send the helicopter.'

18. Nuttall's Aston

This time Nuttall was waiting at the helipad. Madeline disembarked carrying a slumbering Adam on her shoulder.

'We have to go down to the 'V' room urgently,' Madeline yelled over the noise of the helicopter. 'There are traitors about again.'

Neither of them said a word until they were in the 'V' room with the door securely shut.

'What's the matter with Adam?'

'I had to put him out.'

'So, what evidence have you got?

At that moment Adam started to stir.

'What the hell? Where am I?' protested Adam.

'Bear with me, you'll understand in a few minutes, sweetheart.'

'Come on, I'm a busy man. Where's your evidence?' snapped Nuttall.

Madeline slowly edged towards the door and discretely prepared her laser finger. The end of her finger hinged down silently.

'It's me, I'm your evidence, I'm supporting the Americans,' said Madeline calmly.

'The hell!' Nuttall yelled as he reached inside his jacket for his handgun.

'Don't bother, you know it'll have little effect. Just bear with me for a few minutes and then send in the dismantlers, if you still want to.'

'Dismantlers?! I'll have you crushed for this!' steamed Nuttall.

'Think back to the last time when you shot me. Can you remember why you did it?' asked Madeline.

'What's that got to do with anything!' yelled Nuttall.

'Think!' said Madeline sternly, waving her laser finger at him menacingly.

'We were all brainwashed to hate you,' said Nuttall irritably.

‘Precisely! Everyone is now being brainwashed to hate the Americans,’ said Madeline.

‘Utter bloody claptrap!’ said Adam aggressively. ‘The Americans are all putrid scum. We don’t need to be brainwashed to know that.’

It was pointless, the brainwashing had given them a one-track mind, Madeline decided to say no more. Nuttall and Adam continued to scream, threaten, spit and swear at her. She ignored them. Three minutes passed and then she didn’t have to argue anymore.

‘What the hell!?’ puzzled Nuttall.

The effects had worn off.

‘Oh my God, we’re waging war on the Americans… and I was dreadful to you,’ said Adam remorsefully.

‘Yes, you were,’ said Madeline calmly, as she finished off a beef and potato dinner through her mouth tube.

‘It’s that Mark Titoo, whoever he is. He’s turned the world against the US with his ultrasound. Everyone has to be told,’ stressed Nuttall. ‘I have to warn everybody.’

‘You can’t do anything. You can’t leave this room or you’ll revert to hating the Americans again,’ said Madeline.

‘What do we do, then?’ retorted Nuttall.

‘We need those ear devices, Coley was wearing,’ said Madeline.

‘Good thinking. I’ll be immune from the conditioning. I’ll inform the Prime Minister,’ ranted Nuttall.

‘No, I have a better use for them. You’ll have to stay here while I get another set of ear devices for you. Isn’t there any way of communicating with the outside world from down here?’ asked Madeline.

‘I thought you’d never ask.’

Nuttall reached into his pocket, took out a small remote fob and pressed one of the buttons on it. Immediately the whole of the back wall began to move. The wall parted in the middle and moved outwards revealing an entire wall equipped with the most elaborate communications set-up ever seen.

‘Impressive, eh? I can communicate with the whole world from here, control satellites, even communicate with the Vanguard and Astute class submarines.’

‘Not much point though, no one’s going to listen to you,’ said Adam

whilst massaging his temples.

Apart from a slight headache and a nasty taste in his mouth, he was fully recovered from the effects of the fart gas.

‘With us now are you pet?’ asked Madeline affectionately.

‘You bloody farted on me!’

‘What else could I do?’

‘I’ll resume investigating this Mark Titoo chap,’ said Nuttall doing his best to restore his credibility.

‘Coley’s ear devices, where are they?’ Madeline reminded him.

‘They’re in the lab. I’ll send someone down with them.’

‘No, I’ll go and get them. Don’t be tempted to leave the ‘V’ room, either of you!’ said Madeline as firmly as she dared.

‘Try not to kill anyone,’ said Nuttall and Adam together.

As Madeline ascended in the lift, she anticipated the faint hiss of the ultrasound, but there was only silence. It seemed that Barton’s noise-cancelling bandpass filter was working effectively on Poppy’s ears. Madeline was fully aware that everyone she encountered would be behaving irrationally with unjustifiable hatred towards the USA. It was a very strange world indeed.

Anyone with even the slightest American accent had already been beaten up, their head shaved and now wore a placard around their neck saying, ‘I HATE THE USA’. It was becoming a frightening world, but everyone apart from Madeline, Adam, Nuttall and Barton seemed to be happily unaware of it.

Nuttall had given her directions to the lab, but without a security pass most likely she would be stopped and questioned. The lab was situated on the second floor which was exactly where the lift stopped. Only male staff were encountered as she moved along the corridors. This was fortunate as a wink from her perfectly designed eyes and the sight of her overly enlarged breasts distracted them from asking for her pass.

‘Men! Predictable or what?’ she chuntered to herself.

Finally, she reached the lab. Fortunately, it was empty. The two ear devices were abandoned on a desk along with Coley’s other effects including a small family photo of his wife and two young daughters. The return journey was going fine until she came across a rather officious middle-aged woman who evidently hated beautiful, busty women.

‘Where’s your security pass?’ she boomed.

‘Haven’t I got it on? Now, where could that have gone?’

Immediately the dragon got on her radio.

‘We have an intruder, possibly American. Backup required.’

Within seconds, half the staff of Shawlsdown Hall had ascended on the sexy intruder.

‘It’s Madeline Bull the android!’ shouted someone.

‘Was she built in America?’ shouted another someone.

‘Upgraded over there I believe,’ shouted another someone.

‘Destroy her then!’ shouted another someone.

Moments later at least twenty handguns were poised ready to fire but already Madeline had set her laser finger on stun setting. One or two bullets hit their target but the sweeping motions of her laser finger quickly handled the threat.

She did her best not to hurt anyone as she climbed over the heap of bodies with her stilettos but a few bruising prods were unavoidable. She removed a security pass from one of the stunned bodies.

‘Lively out there,’ said Madeline as she returned to the ‘V’ room.

‘Go on then, how many have you zapped?’ asked Adam.

‘No more than twenty, what do you take me for? Don’t worry, they’ll recover,’ she said dismissively.

Madeline quickly wiped the ear devices with the hanging rear flap of Adam’s shirt and gave them to him.

‘Put these in and keep them in,’ said Madeline sternly.

He pulled his face at the thought of them being coated in someone else’s ear wax as he pushed them into his ears.

‘Are you sure they’re on? They don’t seem to have made any difference,’ doubted Adam.

‘Well, they shouldn’t, they’re only filtering out ultrasonic sound,’ explained Madeline.

‘Well, if you have a plan, I hope it’s a good one,’ said Nuttall.

‘I have a hunch, not a plan yet… Put this on, Sweetheart.’

She gave Adam the security pass she had borrowed from one of the

stunned and prodded bodies.

‘More to the point, have you got a plan?’ asked Madeline.

‘All I can do is get my best men down here away from the ultrasound and go from there,’ said Nuttall.

‘Don’t suppose I can borrow your car?’

Nuttall reluctantly dipped his hand in his trouser pocket and threw Madeline the keys.

‘Gold Aston on the rear carpark. Don’t scratch it, and don’t floor it!’ said Nuttall.

A few stunned bodies remained scattered about the corridors. The rest had presumably recovered and were now vengefully looking for the android intruder.

The only possible way to stay alive and get out of the building was for Adam to carry an inactive Madeline on his shoulder. He had done this before but it was not something he particularly enjoyed doing. Madeline was far heavier than she looked.

‘You’ve got her? Excellent! Where are you taking her?’ asked one of the staff.

‘The incinerator. I’m going to melt her down before she reactivates!’ said a quick-thinking Adam.

‘Good idea, here, let me help.’

Adam wasn’t going to argue.

‘Bloody hell, she’s heavy!’

‘Tell me about it,’ said Adam.

This was an ideal arrangement. An inactive android and two people with passes didn’t seem to cause any suspicion. Conveniently, this helpful member of staff took over as spokesman.

‘Good riddance,’ said another member of staff.

‘Yeah, we’re taking her to the incinerator.’

‘Best place for her.’

And it continued like this, along many corridors, passing several people, until they finally reached Nuttall’s fancy car. It happened to be parked not far from the incinerator.

‘Thanks, you can put me down now,’ said Madeline.

The member of staff carrying the heavy android tried to reach for his

gun but he wasn't fast enough. As Madeline slid off his shoulder, she fired her laser finger. As usual, it was completely effective but mostly humane.

'I'll drive! You'll be far too gentle with it,' insisted Madeline.

Predictably she completely disobeyed Nuttall's instructions and pressed her foot hard down on the accelerator pedal. The wheels spun violently, throwing gravel in all directions. Inevitably she lost control around the first bend but skilfully recovered. In seconds, the car was hurtling towards the gateman at an insane speed. Adam had his eyes shut which was perhaps for the best.

The quiet Cheshire roads were ideal to try out this wonderful car.

'Punch in Strangeways prison, darling.'

'Darling? You never call me darling.'

'In a car like this, I couldn't possibly call you anything else, darling,' chirped Madeline.

'OK then, why are we going to Strangeways, darling?'

'To visit my ultimate nemesis.'

'Alexander, is that wise?'

'Probably not, but I feel a visit is long overdue. I'll try not to kill him but I probably will, and then, if my hunch is right, I'll remove a couple of things from him.'

'I'll stay in the car then darling.'

'Wouldn't let you do anything else, darling.'

19. A visit to Strangeways

It just happened to be visiting time which was convenient for Madeline at least. The visiting room was busy with visitors and prisoners all sitting on either side of functional plastic tables. Naturally, security was high as most inmates were lifers. Madeline was already patiently sitting. Alexander entered the room with prison guards on either side of him.

'Hello Aaron,' said Madeline calmly.

'Madeline, what a nice surprise.' said Alexander nervously as he sat down.

'Grown your hair? It suits you.'

'Thank you.'

'Still a resident of Wardate?'

'Wardate? Never heard of it.'

'Really. Something I've pondered with for a while – Residents of Wardate, the gathering of the most evil people in the world. One piece of excrement is bad enough but a festering pile of excrement implies something beyond bad. What is your ultimate goal?' Madeline's hate for him was evident.

'Wouldn't you like to know,' smirked Alexander.

'So, you *have* gathered for a reason? Have you joined in on this hatred towards the USA? Sorry stupid question, you don't need subliminal messages, you've already got the tee-shirt. You hate everyone.

'Don't know what you're talking about,' said Alexander.

'Yes, you do. Let me postulate, something I often like to do. Mark Titoo, he's not on the Wardate list, how strange?'

'Never heard of him.'

'Yes, you have! Thing is, turning the world's population in on itself by making the rest of the world hate the USA, has to be the evilest, most depraved thing anyone could do. For a start, the countless people who will be killed in the conflict will be incalculable. Far worse than what you and Tara Gogli did. So why isn't Mark Titoo on the list? Only one

possible explanation, he must be the founder of Wardate, the one who gathered you all. He wants all of you for something, ordinary, decent people are incapable of doing. You see, a club, gathering, whatever you like to call it, usually implies people sticking together, being mates, helping one another out, being nice to each other. You can see the problem here, can't you? You're all evil, you don't know how to be nice. You're all backstabbing, selfish, treacherous pieces of sputum. How can you possibly help each other out?

'I haven't a clue what you're babbling on about,' said Alexander as sincerely as any evil person could be.

Madeline returned to the subject of his hair.

'Grown your hair for any particular reason? Anyway, moving on, I think you know I have a score to settle. I'll get to the point, you tried to kill me. Did you know that being burnt alive happens to be my worst nightmare for obvious reasons? I used to respect you – think you were a nice person. I even trusted you with my life. What happened?'

Madeline reached for his hand across the table and held it firmly.

'There is still time to redeem yourself you know – make peace with your soul, it's not too late.'

Alexander briefly considered what Madeline had just said.

'I do have regrets in my life. The biggest one is that I didn't finish you off properly when I had the chance.'

'Exactly what I wanted to hear,' said Madeline concisely.

Madeline released his hand. The small hypodermic needle was still protruding from her finger. Alexander glanced at the needle. His smugness instantly turned into terror.

'What the hell have you done!?'

'For Brownsword, Angela, Sid, Lauren and all the others who suffered at your hands, I've just given you a lethal dose of cyanide. You just mentioned hell, you'll be there in about five seconds,' said Madeline coldly.

Alexander said nothing, he didn't have time to think of anything pertinent to say. Moments later, he gave his last gasp and slumped forward. Madeline caught his head with both hands before it hit the table. She moved the hair covering his ears with her thumbs and prised out two little ear devices. They were exactly the same as the ones that Coley had in his ears. She restored her hypodermic finger and inflated her breasts.

‘Officer!’ shouted Madeline. ‘He’s just passed out. One moment he was staring down my cleavage and the next, he almost fell in. You don’t think he’s had a heart attack, do you?’ said Madeline pertly.

No questions were asked. Alexander was carried out by two officers and Madeline was subsequently told to leave – in her own good time – if she wanted to – there was no rush.

Adam was snoozing in the Aston. The luxury clunk of the door closing woke him up.

‘How’s Alexander?’

‘Dead,’ said Madeline concisely.

‘Feel better?’

‘No, not really. I don’t enjoy killing you know!’

Adam knew it was best to say no more on the subject.

‘Where to now?’ asked Adam.

‘We have to deliver these.’

She displayed the ear devices in her hand.

‘Back to Shawlsdown hall then?’

‘No, not quite… Barton, I’m afraid I have no alternative, I have to pay you a visit.’

‘No chance, your location has to be kept a secret.’

‘Don’t be ridiculous, you can’t leave there without being brainwashed and you need food. I’ve got a pair of ear devices. You need to wear them, after you’ve figured out how they work, of course.’

There were a few moments of silence before Barton replied.

‘That watch Nuttall lent you, it will almost contain a tracking device.’

‘No problem, I’ll leave it with Adam, he can stay at the inn.’

‘No way, forget it! I’m coming with you,’ protested Adam.

‘Sweetheart, how many torn out fingernails will it take before you divulge my whereabouts?’

‘I’ll stay at the inn then.’

‘Nuttall’s car will most likely have a tracker too.’

‘What a pity. It looks like you’ll be going in my boring old Volvo,’ said Adam.

20. A shop in Buxton

Barton behaved like the voice on a sat-nav. He wouldn't say where she was going just 'next left', 'next right' third exit off the roundabout' etc, etc. Madeline, as mentioned previously, liked the Volvo, it was like a big leather armchair with wheels, but most importantly, it belonged to Adam. She had made it clear that she wanted first refusal if he ever wanted to part with it but unfortunately, Adam was the sort that ran his cars into the ground before considering a replacement.

The long drive gave her a chance to think, not about the current happenings but about how exactly she functioned. She squeezed the throttle down a touch and tried to visualise the mechanisms of what was happening – she couldn't. Now that her unique existence had become second nature, the reality was shrouded with incredulity. As far as she was concerned, she pressed her right foot down, it was her foot, and the car went *a little* faster and that was that. She had entirely embraced this incredible woman machine.

Thoughts like this always surfaced when there was an imminent visit to her real self. As far as she was concerned, never seeing her real body again was no bad thing but she had to see Barton. As it was, he was effectively a prisoner. He couldn't leave the shielded room or he would be influenced by the ultrasound and once again hate the Americans. Then he would punish Madeline for not hating the Americans. It didn't bear thinking about.

Everyone under the influence of this brainwashing was irrational, unpredictable and intolerant of anything even remotely to do with the USA. She watched several people as she drove past. Everyone looked happy but had an unmistakable glazed look about them – a trance-like look. Even the dogs barked differently. No one was the slightest bit aware of what was happening to them. She saw several bald people with placards around their necks. They seemed to have embraced their punishment as though they thoroughly deserved it. All the fast-food places: MacDonald's, KFC, Pizza Huts, etc, were closed. It had become a very strange and frightening world to live in.

'*Nearly there,*' said Barton. *'Park up where you can.'*

'This is Buxton then?'

'Yes, the highest town in England.'

A few minutes later, Madeline found herself standing in front of a boarded-up shop. A few letters had fallen off the battered sign above leaving a cryptic clue as to what was once sold inside: **"*arton's eats*".**

'Now the tricky bit. I'm in a storeroom at the back. I have to come out of the range of the bandpass filter to let you in,' said Barton.

'Make it quick then!'

In the short time that it took Barton to get to the front entrance of the disused shop and unlock the door, he had changed. Madeline could see the glazed look in his eyes. The strength of the brainwashing ultrasound was obviously at full strength now.

'Barton, don't do anything stupid!' said Madeline.

Madeline was hoping that she wouldn't have to react but as a precaution, her finger and thumb were poised on weapon 1, her disabling gas. Unfortunately, he began to scream out like a madman, 'Traitor, traitor, American sympathiser…'

She had no choice, but to let a little fart sneak out.

'I'm so, so sorry Bops,' she said as he collapsed into her arms.

Luckily, no one saw or heard the incident, but if they did, chances are that they mistook it as a joyous welcome between father and daughter. She dragged him into the shop and locked the door behind her. At the back of the shop, there was an open door with a room beyond. She knew exactly what she would find in there – her tank where she, Poppy, was.

The reunion of herself with herself always brought back painful memories. With Barton still heavily on her shoulder, she hesitantly entered the room and closed the door behind her. Carefully she lowered his limp body onto a chair and for no reason, kissed him on the forehead. The tank, Poppy's tank was there, prominent and imposing. She was fully aware of it but averted her eyes from that particular direction. She scanned the remaining part of the room. Clearly, it was no place for Barton to stay long term especially as there was no place to sleep and a complete lack of cooking facilities. There were, however, copious stocks of food and drink but that was first and foremost for Poppy in her tank.

The countless pipes and cables linking her tank to the equipment were now arranged neatly and fastened with plastic ties. This was a huge contrast to how it was in the cowshed in South Wales – her previous location. As usual, there was a large monitor on one wall, irritatingly

showing her eyesight and quietly howling with audio feedback – she turned it off. Still refraining from looking at her tank, she turned to Barton. He had aged considerably since she had last seen him even though it was only a few weeks ago. Unavoidably she became emotional again and decided that she was very proud to have him as a father figure. He had sacrificed a lot for her and she was fully aware of this fact. Because of him, she had this new wonderful body, was inwardly fit and healthy and had a purpose in life. He was steadfastly devoting his life to her and she had just gassed him, for his troubles. Yes, she had been instrumental in finding his daughter, Lauren, saving her from a dreadful, painful, lonely death but any feisty android would have done the same.

It was now or never. She clenched her teeth and slowly turned around towards her tank. The polished stainless steel randomly reflected the light from the room's fluorescent strip lights. The soot stains from the fire had been completely removed. Clearly, Barton had been busy with the metal polish. The unfortunate consequence was that it was now looked even more clinical, overbearing and oppressing. She tapped one of the sides. She heard it and felt it resounding all around her. She examined the hatch on the top and could see one of the screws had been mauled. As she walked about, she could see the pneumatics silently adding motion to the tank. She jumped up, the pneumatics jolted the tank downwards, she landed, the pneumatics jolted the tank upwards. The technology was fascinating although overwhelmingly oppressing.

Finally, Barton stirred.

'How are you, Bops?' said Madeline affectionately.

'Did you have to do that?' moaned Barton, struggling to get to his feet.

'Try not to move too quickly, the effects will wear off in a moment – I think.'

'Astonishing, the ultrasound brainwashing is definitely more powerful than I thought,' said Barton, still dizzy from the effects of the knock-out gas.

Madeline took the small ear devices she had removed from Alexander's ears, out of her inside jacket pocket.

'See if you can figure out how these things work. You may want to clean them before you fit them in your ears. I'd hate you to catch anything off Alexander!'

'Probably some kind of filtering circuitry, unless it's alien technology,' said Barton seriously.

‘Alien? Do you think it might be?’ she said gullibly.

‘As if! I read a paper about this years ago. I believe even Hitler had his scientist working on something similar back in the forties. High energy projected ultrasound.’

‘We can blame Hitler for all this, then?’

‘Fortunately, the technology wasn’t around then to make it possible.’

By now Barton was on his feet and had already started plugging in various instruments and testing equipment.

‘Why Buxton of all places?’

‘My father's butcher’s shop, Barton’s Meats. It’s been empty for years. Thought I’d make use of the building.’

‘Ah, so that’s what it’s supposed to say. You come from a family of butchers then?’

‘Yes, and proud of it! The girth of the Barton sausage was renowned throughout the North.’

‘I’ll take your word for it,’ said Madeline prudently, doing her best not to smile, but she did.

Barton turned the monitor back on, it showed Madeline’s eyesight. She was just about to complain but he quickly switched it over to a news channel.

‘Wonderful, wonderful news! Tomorrow, we begin the invasion. Nine hundred warships, eighty aircraft carriers and three hundred nuclear submarines are due to sail from all points on the globe, converging in the Atlantic. We will soon eradicate the foulness from this glorious planet of ours…’

‘For god's sake, turn that tripe off,’ said Madeline.

‘Terrifying, it’s like something out of Mein Kampf,’ said Barton.

‘I just hope Nuttall has some good news for me but I’m not holding my breath. An overbearing bungling twerp if you ask me,’ sighed Madeline.

21. A useful phone app

All Barton's time was now used up in figuring out how the ear devices functioned. Unfortunately for Madeline, it meant that she would have to find her own way back to the inn. Consequently, the journey took her two hours longer than it should have done mainly because she went via Leeds to get back to Cheshire.

As expected, Nuttall's Aston Martin was parked neatly outside the inn. No doubt Adam had given it a quick polish before he left it. She assumed he would be in the snug on his third or fourth pint, but he wasn't.

'Seen Adam?' Madeline asked Bert the barman.

Bert turned around slowly and trance-like. His eyes were wide open and staring, his mouth open, but not smiling.

'Are you, his friend?' he said without emotion.

'You know I am. Come on Bert, where is he?'

Things had most definitely changed for the worst. Last night Madeline was completely unaware that Bert owned a double-barrel rifle but now, without hesitation, he fired a warning shot over her head with it. The clientele seemed to be oblivious to his actions and once the smoke and plaster dust had settled, they resumed their drinking and socialising. Madeline was not at all happy that she was now covered in a layer of grey dust. With one tug of her delicate hands, the nineteen-stone barman jerked forwards toward size zero, one, two or three Madeline.

'Finished? I said… where… is… Adam?' growled Madeline.

Acting on this violence towards beloved Bert the barman, all his faithful clientele jumped from their seats.

'Sit back down!' Madeline bellowed.

Credit to all of them, they were undaunted and continued to approach Madeline with waving fists, walking sticks and snooker cues.

'Hang on, I'll be back with you in a sec,' said Madeline to Bert.

No doubt the clientele would have behaved differently if they had

known about her laser finger but they didn't. The sweeping action proved most effective for mass stunning.

'Right Bert, where were we? Oh yes, you were about to tell me where Adam is.'

Predictably, he wouldn't and he couldn't. The brainwashing influence was far too strong for him to betray his inner consciousness. Fortunately, now the lounge was virtually silent, her new super-sensitive hearing heard a faint thumping noise from somewhere below.

'Okay, he's in the cellar, thanks for nothing.'

With that, the laser finger was energised once more and Bert joined the rest, out cold and stunned.

Madeline clambered down the stone steps. At first, all was in total darkness but after a few moments, her highly sensitive optics adjusted. Suddenly her sight homed in on a feeble figure, chained up to a steel bracket in the brick wall of the cold damp cellar. It was definitely Adam but most of his hair had been shaved off and he was completely naked. Madeline was justifiably horrified.

'Oh my God, Adam, sweetheart, what have they done to you?'

Adam found it difficult to talk, uncontrollably shivering in the dankness of his surroundings. Small cuts and bruises covered his body and a painful-looking black eye substantially marred his good looks.

'The bastards, they'll pay for this!' said Madeline.

Temporarily, she engaged explosive motion level 5 and pulled the links of the chain apart and then carried Adam up into the warmth of the inn lounge. She then spent several minutes stripping the clothes off the stunned clientele and then presented them to her naked, groaning soldier.

'Take your pick.'

He chose a pair of designer jeans, a Versace shirt, an Armani jacket and a very nice pair of handmade snakeskin shoes which happened to be size nine – his size. The remainder of the clothes were tossed into the open roaring fire.

'It was awful, worse than a nightmare. They were like a pack of feral dogs, thumping and kicking me. They seemed to be worked up into a frenzy. I've never seen anything like it,' said Adam.

'You must have done something to upset them?'

'All I said was that Bert looked a bit like William Shatner, you know,

the American actor who plays James T Kirk. I thought it would have been taken as a compliment. It's these damn implants in my ears.'

'Adam, my poor soul, what am I going to do with you? I must say you look quite sexy without hair.'

Madeline did her best to dust herself down. Her hair and special non-stick skin had repelled all traces of the dust but her jacket was now fashioning several shades of grey.

'Adds to the look, don't you think… We better get going, they'll be stirring in a few minutes.'

'You're not going to like this, they took that £60,000 watch,' said Adam.

'Don't worry, it was on Captain Kirk's wrist. Couldn't help but notice it when he was flying across the bar.'

In record time they had packed and were *screaming* down the road in the Volvo. The Aston had served its purpose. Nuttall could pick it up at his convenience.

Madeline chuckled, 'He did look a bit like James T Kirk though, didn't he?'

'On a really good day! Some people are just too touchy,' said Adam wincing slightly with his injuries.

'I'm trying to think who you look like… That's it! Bruce Willis! These Americans get everywhere… Don't worry Sweetheart, it'll grow,' said Madeline still smiling.

'I need some underpants!' said Adam, clearly in a moderate amount of discomfort.

Strangely enough, people were still going about their normal business. People still went shopping, still got parking fines, cued in the supermarkets, piled onto the buses, took their dogs for walks and chatted on the streets. As long as you didn't mention anything about the USA, use American products and talk with an American accent, you didn't get beaten up, shaved and stamped on. Generally, people were still nice and friendly towards each other.

While Adam was in Marks and Spencer's, in the underwear department, Madeline swiped the screen on her super new watch.

'Nuttall, are you there? It's Madeline.'

A couple of minutes passed before he replied.

'I'm here… It's become a little crowded down here in the 'V' room. Little

we can do about the invasion, especially from down here. Made a bit of progress with the Wardate residents. For some strange reason, most people on the list appear to be making their way to the Middle East, Jordan of all places. Where are you?'

'About to leave Cheshire. I'll keep you informed,' said Madeline avoiding too much detail.

Adam emerged from a changing room, now chafe-free.

'What's Nuttall got to say?' enquired Adam while admiring himself in a mirror. 'Quite like the bald look, goes with these designer clothes, don't you think?'

'Not sure I do. What do you know about Jordan?'

'Jordan? Not much. It's the middle of the ancient world, why?'

'For some reason, all the residents of Wardate are congregating there.'

'I know it's near the Dead Sea,' added Adam.

'Dead? Why is it dead?' asked Madeline.

It was quite a relevant question to ask but she didn't realise it.

'I don't know. Possibly because it's the lowest dry land on Earth?'

'What's that got to do with being dead?' asked Madeline with indifference.

Adam was right with his facts. All the residents of Wardate that weren't otherwise involved in some heinous crime, were gathering close to the Dead Sea near Jordan – a place that happened to be well below sea level. This had a significance which would be revealed in the fullness of time. Madeline moved on.

'Barton, have you made any progress with the ear devices?'

'Well, yes, it appears that they're just simple mechanical ultrasound filters. No electronics. Should be quite easy to replicate. An ultrasound oscillator tuned to that frequency should mask the sound and have the same effect.

'You could make some more devices then?' asked Madeline, completely lost with the techno jabber.

'I could do but it will take time. However, as a temporary measure, I believe there's a smartphone app that should be just as effective. I'll find the name of it'

'Great, let me know.'

By the time Adam had finished admiring himself in the mirror and chomped his way through a ham and egg baguette, Barton had found

a suitable app. Madeline loaded it on her super new £60,000 satellite, smartphone, GPS watch and activated it.

‘Let’s go somewhere quiet,’ said Madeline.

‘Another cosy friendly pub?’ suggested Adam.

Eventually, they found a suitable pub. It was rough, rowdy and packed with questionable characters. If the app didn’t work, Madeline would, no doubt, shortly be having fun with her laser finger - again. They found an empty table and sat down without a drink between them. Madeline activated the app and waited. No apparent noise came from her watch, she just assumed it was on and emitting some kind of neutralising ultrasound wave. After five minutes it was time to be brave and say something nice about the USA.

‘I feel really sorry for the Americans, I do hope they don’t get hurt,’ said Madeline at the top of her voice.

Adam ducked, cringed and then lowered himself under the table. Madeline held her breath in anticipation but no bullets, knives, chairs or fists flew across the room. However, suddenly everyone went very quiet.

‘Oh tits!’ screamed Adam from under the table. He tensed himself ready for the onslaught of beer glasses, chairs and anything else that could cause injury.

‘I do too,’ said a rather large butch woman.

‘And me!’ said another.

And then a remarkable thing happened, they all started weeping inconsolably. Guilt was stinging them all deeply. What had they been thinking? How could they have possibly gone along with the insane madness? The television on the wall was spouting out perpetual war chants in subtitles but the clientele was now horrified by what they all knew was about to happen.

‘We can’t allow this!’ shouted someone.

‘No! We have to stop it!’ shouted someone else.

A rousing chant of ‘yes, yes’ filled the room. Of course, this was just a test, so Madeline turned off the app. Within seconds everyone returned to their former state of loathing the Americans.

‘What did you say!?’ growled the large butch woman.

‘I said… I *don’t* feel sorry for the Americans, I do hope they get hurt,’ said Madeline as viciously as possible.

‘Good on yer, girl. Less of the ‘A’ word though, eh?’

‘Nuttall, Nuttall, where are you?’ Madeline whispered into her remarkable watch.

‘I’m here, what’s up?’

‘Sending you the name of a phone app. Get everyone to install it and tell them to keep it running. We’ve just tested it in this pub and it seems to be quite effective. I don’t know its range. That’s something you’ll have to experiment with.’

‘Excellent, excellent, perhaps we can claim back the upstairs. It’s getting a bit claustrophobic down here. How did you find out about it?’

‘Perhaps I’m smarter than you think,’ said Madeline smugly.

22. Fast food now available

The app worked brilliantly. It was a straightforward matter of taking back control of Shawlsdown Hall. The in-house boffins quickly realised that it was a simple dog whistle app. A frequency of 25.35 kHz was piped through the PA system. It did exactly the same job in neutralising the ultrasound.

The next step was to share this knowledge with all the other government sites, departments and military bases. A few gunshots were inevitably fired in the process but on the whole, only a few were killed. The mission was successful.

Unfortunately, as far as the British fleet was concerned, it was too late, they had already left shore. Several methods were tried to infiltrate the ships or fly close enough to transmit the neutralising signal but all attempts failed. Any planes and helicopters flying nearby were misinterpreted as an enemy attack and indiscriminately shot out of the sky.

Time was running out. It was all down to one person now. One person alone who could perhaps save the world, but her priority right now was to get a recharge and smarten herself up. Her leather jacket had seen better days although it could be misinterpreted as a new avant-garde look.

There was ever only one proper solution to end this awful affair: to stop the brainwashing ultrasound signal at its source.

Bit by bit, country by country and continent by continent, the message got through about using the dog whistle phone app. Slowly but surely people became sane again and realised they simply adored anything American. Fast food restaurants reopened. People returned to using their iPhones, iPods and Apple Macs. In fact, absolutely anything associated with the USA was cool once more. Unfortunately, this mindset failed to get through to any of the countless ships now converging in the Atlantic Ocean.

The most tragic aspect of all this subliminal brainwashing was the effect it had on the target nation. The whole of the USA was hearing their version of this ultrasound which made them have an extremely low esteem of themselves. They felt unworthy of being attacked. Mass

suicide was considered to save the fleet of ships from going to the trouble of attacking them. Their economy had collapsed, the birth rate had stalled and only repeats were now shown on TV. No one knew if they would actually fight back or just take it. After all, hardly anyone was now working for a living, most were off sick with severe depression.

The information about the phone app needed to get through to them but all communication had been severed. All air travel had stopped and their internet had been purposely infected with a very serious, debilitating virus.

There was only one way forward, someone had to go to America and tell them.

Madeline had a new mission.

23. Parachute training

Her new mission: Get to the USA and introduce them to the neutralising ultrasound phone app, better known as the dog whistle app. It was a simple mission but it would take careful planning and training. A Typhoon two-seater jet fighter would take her there. It couldn't take the direct route to the USA, over the Atlantic, because it would most likely be shot down in anger, therefore, it had to go the long way around. Several hops going eastwards, several refuelling stages and then she would be dropped as far over the North American continent as fuel would allow. Madeline would then be on her own in a land that was engulfed in self-hate.

Madeline had never seen a parachute up close before let alone wear one. And obviously, she had never been ejected out of a fighter jet either. Now she was about to do both, at the same time. If that wasn't enough, then she had to land without smashing up her lovely new body on the hard earth below. She was assured that it was mostly an automatic process, she just had to let things happen. However, Madeline had a serious problem, Poppy was terrified of heights.

The training instructions were basic and written on a small piece of paper:

1 Keep your arms in when being ejected

2 Keep your legs bent when landing.

Adam was jealous to death and couldn't, for the life of him, understand why Madeline was like she was. What could possibly harm her? After all, she was safely in a tank and her android body was indestructible. Of course, she knew all this. She knew she was secured in a tank firmly attached to the ground. However, now that she was fully assimilated into her android form, she *would* be up in the air supported only by a thin nylon sheet and a length of thin paracord. The whole system that she was a fundamental part of, was designed to convince Poppy that she was Madeline. She was *inside* Madeline, experiencing exactly what Madeline was experiencing. In every respect, she was wholly convinced. If something did go wrong, her indestructible body may well cope with hitting the ground at 120 mph but would her mind?

One practice flight, that's all she had time for. There was no use protesting, it was her job, period. She had to do it and do it well. Who'd ever heard of a British secret agent who couldn't glide to earth on a parachute while having a gunfight, eating a banana sandwich and sending a text to Moneypenny – all at the same time?

For a start she didn't like the pressure suit, it didn't do justice to her size zero, one, two or three, figure. Apart from anything, the helmet would seriously mess her hair up. After all, she didn't need to be pressurised or heated, she was an android but the ground crew didn't know this. She didn't need to be told about possibly suffering a spine fracture when the seat was ejected. Her spine was made of unbreakable chloro-bromine, but it was their job to tell her.

The cockpit was certainly a snug fit even for Madeline's shapely frame. She looked at the piece of paper again and again and again even though it only had two simple instructions on it. Yes, she was terrified. What if she wasn't strapped in properly? They seemed to strap her in remarkably quickly. Perhaps a resident of Wardate was one of the ground crew. She told herself not to be stupid, everything would be fine. Ordinary people do this every day, but she was anything but ordinary. Would her Madeline machine fail with the high G forces? Would her connection fail? These are things human beings don't particularly worry about. On reflection, automatons have their own particular weaknesses, she realised. However, now was not the time to doubt her brilliant scientists and builders.

She experienced the acceleration as the engines howled and catapulted the jet along the runway. Her suit tightened, holding her in place. And then she was lying on her back, the sky in front of her with the clouds rapidly approaching. She screamed with delight. This beat anything she had ever done before as a human. Then, far too quickly, it was time.

'Ready?' said the pilot.

He didn't give time for a reply, her seat suddenly shot upwards and then the inbuilt rockets engaged. She imagined the pneumatics on her Poppy tank going to the extreme position to simulate the G-force. The aircraft rapidly distanced itself below her and the smallest of parachutes opened above her.

'What the hell!? How's that going to stop me?' she screamed.

She then proceeded to free fall, trapped in her seat. She was terrified and convinced that she was going to splat on the ground below. After a short time of screaming and swearing, a much larger parachute suddenly appeared above her and her seat instantly fell away. She

rapidly slowed down. Then, suddenly, it was wonderful, brilliant and so peaceful. Her perception changed in an instant. Why hadn't she done this before? In no time, the ground approached. She remembered to bend her legs just in time. It was far from a gentle landing but she was safely on the ground and her brief training was over. She wanted to do it again – she wouldn't have to wait long.

It was time to say goodbye to Adam, they kissed and hugged but couldn't say much, the scream of the jets warming up behind them drowned out any sloppy talk. She had no luggage nor an overnight bag; androids don't need such things. The minimal amount of clothes underneath her flight suit would have to do for the duration of her mission. The only necessary items she had to have, were her universal charging lead and her government-provided credit card.

Once again, she was hurtling upwards, towards the clouds. She had a total of six hours of flight to look forward to and three refuelling stops.

She decided to make friends with the pilot.

'Got your ear devices in?' asked Madeline, making sure he was definitely on her side.

'Naturally! Names Jack by the way,' said the pilot.

'Madeline. I'm an android, by the way.'

'Apparently so. They say you're a technical marvel.'

'Probably even better than that!'

'Technical marvel and modest.'

'How long do the fuel stops take?'

'Twenty minutes max. Hardly enough time to go the loo!'

'Poo'd pants then?'

'Often!'

The route was more or less over the top of the world: Finland, Russia, Siberia, Alaska, Canada and as far as fuel would allow into the North American continent. Landing on US soil was considered too dangerous for several reasons but mainly because most landing strips were now cluttered with abandoned Aircraft. Six hours passed relatively quickly. She gave herself a last-minute charge with the onboard mains inverter, said goodbye to her new friend, Jack and braced herself.

24. Extreme G

Predictably, the main parachute opened far too late and she forgot to bend her knees but other than punching imprints in the earth with her feet when she landed, she enjoyed the experience just as much as the first time. If it wasn't for her super new £60,000 satellite, smartphone, GPS watch, she wouldn't have had a clue where she was. It informed her that she was two miles from a town called Montevideo. She still hadn't a clue where she was.

The flying suit was discarded and the stunning Madeline Bull resumed: A new short black leather jacket over a short red dress and high-heeled leather boots. Consequently, it wasn't hard to hitch a lift. A tanker truck quickly came to a halt beside her.

'Going far?' asked Madeline.

'Minneapolis,' said the truck driver.

'That'll do fine,' said Madeline, it was a place she had heard of.

Hitching a lift always has its dangers especially if you happen to purposely flaunt a promiscuous appearance – not that Madeline was in any sense asking for it. Her look was simply one of her tools/weapons that she used to her advantage. However, to her surprise, the driver behaved himself impeccably. He explained that normally he would have humped her senseless on the bunk bed behind him but he was so depressed that he couldn't bring himself to think about such things. He hated who he was, hated being American, hated his job. He wanted to end it all.

'I'm going to help you,' said Madeline, 'but it will only be temporary.'

The driver couldn't possibly imagine how a road hooker could help him so he dismissed the comment and carried on driving with his eyes fixed on the road. Madeline ran the app on her super £60,000 phone watch and then had a snack, not that anyone would know. Being thrown around in a fast fighter jet and then thrown out of the same fast fighter jet had made her a little queasy. However, now, her appetite reaffirmed itself with a vengeance. Hot thick minestrone soup followed by strawberry yoghurt, sucked up a tube, filled a hole in Poppy's tummy.

The first indication that the phone app was working was a huge hairy hand on her silky-smooth shapely thigh. Naturally, Madeline removed it. The driver then brought the truck to a halt, operated the door locks and started to remove his trousers.

'Hmm, perhaps helping him wasn't such a good idea,' Madeline thought.

Farting on the driver and pushing him out onto the highway was the easy bit, the hard bit was driving the forty-ton truck. How hard could it be, she knew there were women truck drivers all over the world. All the controls were in the same place as a car so she drove it like Adam's Volvo. The kangarooing eventually subsided after about two miles and then it was easy-peasy, providing she didn't have to stop, change gear, slow down, reverse or go around corners.

It was a shock, no other word for it. Minneapolis had seen better days. Shops were ransacked, cars burnt out and most of the houses boarded up. She slowed down to have a closer look. Further down the road, a frenzied gang of raging people pelted the truck with bricks and stones. Inevitably, the windscreen got smashed. Then they tried to jump aboard and open the doors. Despite Madeline's many advantages, she was uncharacteristically terrified. Something was clearly wrong. By all accounts, the brainwashing effect had made people meek and despondent, not violent and feral. Perhaps they were some sort of an anti-American faction and the brainwashing had produced a cumulative effect and turned these people into possessed fanatics.

Suddenly she could go no further due to several abandoned vehicles blocking the way. She pressed the brake pedal sharply and the truck violently juddered to a halt throwing her violently forward.

'No problem, I can run the rest of the way in explosive motion,' she thought as she prised herself out of the dashboard.

This was, of course, wishful thinking. Ahead of her, an unbroken line of vans, buses and trucks formed an impenetrable barricade. The purpose was unclear, possibly to keep these madmen out of the city or to keep the despondent ones in. Whichever it was, it didn't particularly matter to Madeline as she was trapped and quickly surrounded by several wild maniacs. No matter, her laser on stun would surely make short work of the problem. She casually rubbed her thumb and forefinger together to prime her weapon. She tried again, and again, but no response. Inconveniently, her system had gone down.

'Shit!' she cried. 'Barton, are you there? I can't activate my weapons. Got any ideas?'

'Thought you got off lightly when you were ejected out of that jet. Some of your onboard systems must have temporarily shut down with the extreme G-forces. There's nothing I can do from here. You should reboot eventually,' said Barton.

'Great,' she grumbled, 'I'll just have to do it the hard way.'

'Well, well, what have we here? Get her!' instructed the leader of the madmen.

Normally she could have easily fought them off with her explosive motion or laser finger, causing some nasty injuries in the process. However, her system was justifiably protesting against being catapulted out of a cockpit and being dropped from a great height. She was curious as to their intentions so she decided to let things develop. One of them frisked her – several times, then another frisked her and then another. All they found was a harmless charging lead. Up until now, Madeline had been very tolerant, but now it was time to activate the app on her super £60,000 watch. Surely *that* still worked?

'Boys, boys, you'll get my clothes all creased,' said Madeline casually.

'Put her with the rest!' said the leader… 'Wait!'

The leader of the lunatics suddenly spotted her watch. He had no idea that *apparently* it was a £60,000 satellite, smartphone, GPS watch and had an app presently running on it, he just liked the look of it.

'I'll have that!' said the leader, snatching it off her wrist.

She was then escorted down a side street and thrown into a room with several other men and women. They were all huddled together, hungry, frightened and despondent. She sat amongst them and asked them who they were and how long they'd been there. This was mainly to put them at ease.

'Don't worry, we'll be out of here in a minute,' reassured Madeline.

'What makes you think that?' asked one of the women.

'They stole my wristwatch.'

Naturally, they thought, '*another mad woman, that's all we need!'*

'Anybody got a smartphone?' asked Madeline.

'Yes, but the batterie is flat,' said one of the men.

'No problem, I always carry a charging lead with me.'

It wasn't, strictly speaking, for charging mobile phones, more for charging androids but it could be adapted. Her USB port would charge the mobile phone in minutes. Naturally, plugging a charging lead into

her big toe raised a few eyebrows but they were far too depressed to quiz her about it. She downloaded the ultrasound app on the phone and ran the program. A few minutes later, one by one, they all came out of the trance that they didn't realise they were in.

'Oh my God, what the hell is happening to us?' cried one of the women.

Madeline had just enough time to tell them all about Mark Titoo and his anti-American brainwashing ultrasound before the leader of the madmen walked in.

'You're going to find this really strange but suddenly we don't know why we've done this to you,' said the leader.

One by one his men walked in, tails between their legs, looking ashamed of their actions. They apologised and the others all forgave them. Madeline tolerated a few minutes of hugging, shaking hands and chatting but time was pressing.

'Okay, okay, perhaps you can do all this later? You may not have realised it but there is a serious problem looming off the east coast,' said Madeline.

'Oh my God, it wasn't a dream, we *are* going to be invaded,' said one of the women.

'I suppose I better introduce myself, I'm Madeline Bull, British agent, MI7.'

'No such thing,' said one of the previously captured men.

Madeline ignored him.

'You've all been brainwashed by ultrasound. It's making you despise yourselves. Contrarily, much of the world is being brainwashed to hate you, that's why the largest invasion fleet in history is heading your way. There's now an app running on this smartphone…'

Madeline forcibly grabbed hold of the wrist of the leader – who happened to be wearing the $100,000 watch.

'And this watch, also has the same app running. It inhibits the signal.'

'You expect us to believe that load of poppycock?' said another of the previously captured men.

'If only you knew… Anyway, believe what you want but the rest of the world hates you and you're about to be invaded. They are the facts.'

She could have also told them that she was an android, one of the

most sophisticated machines on the planet, but she thought it wise not to, especially as she was waiting for her system to reboot.

‘With respect, it seems strange that the British government have sent just one slip of a girl to solve all our problems? Bit of a tall order for you?’ queried the former madmen's leader.

He was right, it was a tall order for one mere human but she wasn’t a mere human, especially not a girl!

‘I’m Alfonsino, by the way. Call me Alf,’ said the leader.

Madeline made a call on her watch.

‘Nuttall, are you there?

Everyone remained silent and let her speak.

‘Madeline, how are you progressing?’ asked Nuttall.

‘Have a group of people here just liberated from the effects. I’m sure they’ll do their best to spread the word. How long have we got before the invasion?’

‘Eleven days before they reach the east coast. Did you land near Minneapolis as planned?’

‘Not exactly, I’m on the outskirts of the city now. Do you know if there are any government agents close to here?’

‘Hang on… Bream, Gemma Bream. She was one of MI 6’s best. I’ll text her address to you.’

‘How’s Adam?’

‘I don’t know, haven’t seen him since you left. Incidentally, we’ve found out that the name Titoo is apparently Russian in origin.’

‘Okay, keep in touch and let me know if you hear from Adam.’

They all listened intently to the conversation over the super £60,000 GPS, satellite, smartphone watch.

‘Who is Adam?’ asked Alf inquisitively.

‘My boyfriend,’ said Madeline with conviction.

They all nodded approvingly. This proved that she was a considerate person despite being a ruthless British secret agent. How little they knew. Madeline continued regardless.

‘The app seems to be effective for about 30 metres, yards. If the app stops for any reason, a flat battery for instance, in under a minute you will revert to being under the influence again. Your country has only eleven days to prepare for the invasion. As many people as possible

must be freed from the brainwashing. I know it's one hell of a task but we have to start somewhere,' said Madeline prudently.

'How long does it take for the app to take effect?' asked another man.

'Up to five minutes depending on people's susceptibility.'

'Okay everybody, you know what we have to do. Mingle, spread out and spread the word,' said Alf.

It was a start, a small start. The first seed had been sewn but this was merely a drop in the ocean. Finding Gemma Bream was Madeline's next move.

'Does anyone know County Road in Roseville?' asked Madeline.

'I'll take you there,' said Alf.

He had a minibus parked just around the corner, away from the barricade. Alf seemed a pleasant chap, hard to believe that not so long ago he was behaving like a wild thug. All it had taken to alter his frame of mind was the inaudible sound of a dog whistle app emitted from her super-duper watch. She happened to glance at the watch, she stroked the screen to wake it up – it was on the home screen. 'That's strange,' she thought. She checked if the app was running. It wasn't, it had been turned off. The only logical conclusion she could come to was that the app running on Alf's smartphone was now blocking out the ultrasound noise instead. They chatted, perhaps flirted, he was a good-looking man and she was as gorgeous as ever. What harm was there in a little flattery from both sides? Madeline was intrigued as to why the ultrasound had made him behave differently from the rest, turning him into a feral lunatic instead of being depressed and despondent.

'I take it, you've got issues with your country?' asked Madeline.

'Why do you say that?' asked Alf.

'Well, with the brainwashing, you didn't become downhearted like the rest, you became wild and aggressive.'

'Perhaps I have a stronger disposition.'

'Perhaps so,' said Madeline doubtfully.

They drove for no more than half a mile.

'This is the Roseville district,' said Alf.

'Really, so soon? That didn't take long,' said Madeline, mildly protesting.

'We'll walk the rest of the way,' said Alf.

She couldn't see why he couldn't drive right up to the door. Never mind, it was a nice day, she hadn't had time to notice the weather until now. It was clearly warm. She could tell this by what people were wearing. It certainly hadn't been raining for days, she could tell this by the dust and the withered plants and lawns.

'County road is just up here,' said Alf.

Madeline's relaxed manner was suddenly disturbed by a woman, screaming in the distance. They both ran to the source of the distressing cries. They were coming from a basement room under a boarded-up shop. Madeline rushed in first.

The darkened room was empty except for a loudspeaker on the floor playing a recorded sound of a woman in distress. Before Madeline realised what was happening, the door slammed shut. The door happened to be heavily reinforced with bars of steel.

'Alf? What the hell are you doing!?' shouted Madeline.

'Complete your mission now, if you can?' shouted Alf from the other side of the heavy door.

Now she was well and truly pissed off. It had been a trap, a very elaborate one and she had fallen for it, hook line and sinker. The whole charade: the hostile welcome, the barricade and the unfortunate hostages. Whoever had orchestrated the operation had certainly gone to a lot of trouble just for one very special MI7 British agent. Presumably, Alf and his men had never been under the influence of the ultrasound but played their parts so convincingly. The app on her super watch, as she had noticed, was turned off. Only one possible explanation, they must have been wearing the ear devices to block the ultrasound. The conclusion to all this was that there was still an infiltrator – a traitor, in Shawlsdown hall working alongside Nuttall. This person had leaked the details of Madeline's destination and the time of her arrival.

The worrying assumption from all this was that Alf and his men must have known that she was an android.

The elaborate plan had worked out perfectly. They had trapped a super strong, super cunning android, equipped with a host of lethal weapons and potent flatulence and there was not one single casualty.

To find a suitable place that was in effect a fortified dungeon must have been no mean feat. The door was impenetrable, the walls were solid concrete and the ceiling consisted of steel joists with concrete beams between. To make matters worse, she was in total darkness and her super £60,000 watch couldn't get a signal.

However, all this fortification was largely academic. Being unable to access her weaponry, in particular, her explosive motion, a rabbit hutch would have held her. She thumped the door and the walls until eventually, her finger bones broke through her nanotube technology skin. Nothing gave way or even buckled, she was well and truly trapped. She sat down on the floor, next to the wall and held her head in her grazed hands. Madeline Bull, the best hope the world had to offer, had been so easily thwarted. She was clearly no match for Titoo, he had eyes and ears everywhere. He wasn't a state-of-the-art indestructible machine with an abundance of weaponry but he had defeated her with ease. Presumably, he organised this charade while also finding time to brainwash the whole of the human race. He was, well and truly a formidable foe.

'Madeline, don't take this to heart.' Barton's voice came through here audio.

'Good old Barton, I tend to forget you're there. A bit of a joke, aren't I?'

'Rubbish! Let me tell you about one very special young lady. She was beautiful, vivacious and had everything she could ever want. Then one day through no fault of her own, everything was taken from her. No one would have blamed her for an instant if she had conceded there and then and given up on life, but she didn't. She was uniquely special and an amazing person. Her inner strength was unparalleled and boundless, that's why we chose her for our remarkable project. It turns out that it was the best decision I could ever have made.

Naturally, you're going to have your downs as well as ups, that's life but you will get through this because you will always triumph over evil. You are Madeline Bull, never forget that!'

'Thanks, Barton, you're a treasure. At least you believe in me. There's so much at stake though, and precious little time. I feel completely amateurish. Old calamitous Poppy is still there and I can't shake her off.'

'She is and will always be your greatest asset. Dismiss her and Madeline is nothing. Now hang tight. It may take me a while but I'll get help. By the way, your system has rebooted, you should be able to access your system now.'

'Okay, thanks,' said Madeline sombrely.

She turned her explosive motion up to maximum, pondered for a moment and then turned it back down to normal – level 1. The skin on her hands was already severely grazed. She certainly didn't want to make matters worse and damage her weapons, most of which

happened to be in the ends of her fingers. Her finger laser may well have eventually sliced through the door but her energy levels weren't particularly buoyant. The last thing she want was to run out of power. She decided to journey inwards and watch the entire box set, series 1 to 8 of *Hustle*. It would pass the time away nicely.

Fifty hours later and three-quarters of the way through episode three, series seven, there was a bang on the door.

'Move away from the door and protect your ears!' a muffled shout came from the other side of the heavy steel door.

Madeline thought the voice sounded vaguely familiar, but through two inches of steel, it could have been anyone. She moved to the far side of the room. She had no reason to disobey the command. After a few seconds, she heard the sound of a small two-stroke engine fire up and stall and fire up again and stall and fire up again and stall. Then she heard a few muffled swear words and finally the engine fired up and kept running. The next thing she heard was the sound of grinding against the steel of the door. The grinding continued for at least ten minutes until finally the door swung open and light teemed in, momentarily dazzling Madeline's optics. A silhouetted figure stood in the doorway. Madeline's mind played cruel tricks on her, it looked like the silhouette of the one she most wanted to be standing there, but that was impossible, he was on the other side of the world.

'Your Knight has arrived.'

Her ears were now playing tricks on her, it even sounded like Adam.

'Didn't have time to put on the shining armour. Designer jeans and a T-shirt had to do.'

'Adam?' said Madeline in disbelief.

'Come on, just admit it, you can't do without me,' said Adam.

Madeline ran to him and nearly squeezed the essence out of his delicate frame.

'Steady girl, I'm only human.'

Madeline was overcome with emotion and wiped a tear from her eye.

'But how… how did you get here?' asked Madeline.

'Bloody long way, I can tell you. Flew to Iceland, then to Greenland, then to Winnipeg, hired a car, drove over two hundred miles… and then I borrowed a Stihl saw.'

'But, but when did you leave?'

‘Straight after you left. Nothing else to do so I thought I’d follow.’

‘Didn’t anyone stop you at the Canadian border?’

‘Nope, drove straight through. How did you get here?’

‘For some unknown reason, we went an even longer way around. Seems they were slightly over-cautious, and I still ended up in here.’

‘Barton told me where you were,’ said Adam.

‘Good old Barton,’ said Madeline quietly and appreciatively.

‘Been in here long?’

‘Nah, a couple of days at the most. I’ve left the video on pause,’ said Madeline casually.

‘Right, don’t know about you, but I’m starving,’ said Adam.

Unlike the rest of the world, all the fast-food restaurants had remained open even though many of the staff were off sick with depression. Adam chomped his way through two Big Macs, large fries and an apple pie. Madeline finished off watching episode three.

‘Everyone looks depressed. It’s uncomfortably quiet in here,’ commented Adam.

‘Soon fix that,’ said Madeline confidently.

Madeline pressed a few tiny buttons on her super watch, turning on the app.

After only a few minutes, the change was astonishing. The gloom lifted, the chatter returned, people smiled and laughed and then they started asking some pertinent questions. It was time for Madeline to step in and say a few words.

‘Can I have everyone’s attention? All of you have just come out of a kind of trance. You’ve all been brainwashed. You may or may not realise it but in nine days there will be an invasion force of nine hundred warships arriving on your east coast.’

The tension in the restaurant heightened, a few wept, a few panicked but most listened intently to Madeline.

‘Everyone with a smartphone must download an app which blocks out the hypnotic effect. The app is effective for about 30 yards. When you’ve finished off your happy meals, please spread the word. Get everyone you see to use the app. A tall order but somehow in nine days your country has to be ready.’

‘Who the fuck, are you to order us about,’ said a rather large burger

loving slob still finishing off a mouth full of something green and slimy – probably a gherkin.

‘Bull, Madeline Bull, British agent,’ said Madeline proudly. ‘Got a problem with that?’

‘Yeah, I answer to no bitch especially a fuckin Brit!’

‘Okay, fair enough. Everybody else, make sure your battery is kept charged up and that the app doesn’t get turned off,’ said Madeline calmly.

The slob, still chomping on his burger had now made his way over to Madeline.

‘Are you fuckin’ ignoring me? I hate it when people ignore me. I said, I ain’t answering to no fucking bitch!’ said the slob.

‘My advice mate, go and sit down whilst you still can,’ said Adam.

This was the excuse the slob needed. In an instant, his fist landed in the socket of Adam’s other eye – the one that, up until now, wasn’t bruised. Before Adam’s pain receptor had a chance to react, Madeline used her much smaller right fist and placed it, at some speed, on the slob’s chin. The slob fell backwards, breaking a few chairs in the process and shaking the entire building as he landed flat on his back. The clientele cheered and immediately began downloading the app. Madeline examined Adam’s new wounded eye. It was going to be another shiner.

‘My poor sweetheart, half an hour with me and you’ve got another injury.’

‘I’m getting quite used to it… Ow! Where to now,’ asked Adam eagerly.

‘Roseville, perhaps you can do a better job of taking me there.’

‘No problem!’

Adam looked in the A to Z of Minneapolis. Roseville was on the other side of the city.

As they climbed into Adam’s hire car, Alf’s minibus sped past. He was driving and it was full of his traitorous squad.

‘Change of plan, forget Roseville for the moment. Follow that minibus,’ shouted Madeline.

‘Something I should know?’ asked Adam.

‘It’s Alf and his cronies, the man who incarcerated me, and his bunch of apes.’

‘Incarcerated, eh?’

‘I can be quite articulate when I want to be. I *was* a foreign News correspondent, you know!’

‘Oh yes, of course, you were, I remember you saying,’ said Adam genuinely.

If Madeline had dwelt on Adam’s reply she could have become deeply concerned but she had other issues to think about for the moment. She thought about Alf. She couldn’t deny that she had fancied him but only a little. He had won the first round, trapping her cunningly in the nicest possible way with no violence whatsoever. However now she wanted a rematch.

‘We aren’t flushed for time, see if you can edge in front of them,’ said Madeline.

‘Have they got guns?’ asked Adam. It was a perfectly reasonable question.

Adam skilfully overtook the minibus and swerved in front of it.

‘Best that you stay in the car,’ said Madeline, giving him a quick kiss on the cheek. Then she rubbed her thumb and forefinger together and got out.

Alf and his men were waiting for her.

‘Well done, you got out then?’ said Alf cheerfully.

‘Takes more than a fortified dungeon to hold me,’ said Madeline confidently.

‘So, what do we do know?’ Alf asked, as charming as ever.

‘Well, if you try and capture me again and I defend myself,’ said Madeline.

‘Fair enough. Okay boys, open fire.’

A few bullets whizzed past but in seconds, her laser had stunned all of them before any real harm was done. Adam had wisely hunched down behind the dashboard.

‘Adam, quick!’ shouted Madeline.

Adam gingerly climbed out of the car and warily strode over to the pile of unconscious men.

‘Give me a hand. You get their guns and mobile phones and I’ll get their ear devices.’

Minutes later, they had nineteen pairs of ear devices, nineteen

handguns and nineteen mobile phones. They sat in the car and waited.

‘Don’t tell me, we’re waiting for them to come around,’ speculated Adam.

‘Only gave them minimum stun, they’ll be waking in a minute or two.

‘There’s a word for this.’

‘What, gloat?’

‘No, risky,’ said Adam.

Two minutes later they had all roused but now they were under the influence of the ultrasound. All nineteen of them stumbled around in a despondent daze. Madeline got out of the hire car and walked over to them.

‘Don’t you just hate yourself?’ scorned Madeline.

‘I can’t bear the thought of it,’ said a humbled, depressed Alf.

‘Who put you up to this?’

‘You’ll find out shortly. Please, let me have a gun so I can kill myself.’

‘Where is Mark Titoo?’ demanded Madeline.

‘You’ll find out shortly. Please, I have nothing to live for, use your laser weapon on me.’

That was that then, she was going to find out shortly. Her questions were more or less answered.

‘For god's sake, go and lie down, you don’t look well, any of you,’ said Madeline assertively.

‘I think we will, thanks,’ said Alf humbly.

25. A lift to Washington

‘22, County Road, Roseville. There you are, madam. That’ll be eighty-five dollars please,’ said Adam.

‘Extortionate! Keep the engine running cabby, I’ll be out in… it could be a while.’

‘I’ll come with you then.’

It took a while for Gemma Bream to answer the door. Madeline already had her app running on her super watch. The door violently swung open.

‘Yes, what do you want?!’ bawled a tall, slim middle-aged woman with long greying hair.

‘If you are Gemma Bream, I need your help,’ said Madeline.

‘Who are you?’

‘Madeline Bull MI7 and this is Adam.’

‘MI7? No such thing. Sorry, you’ll have to go, I’ve got a terrible headache.’

‘Nuttall says you used to be one of MI 6’s best agents,’ said Madeline before Gemma had a chance to shut the door.

‘Does he? Well, that was a long time ago. Good for nothing… what, what’s happening to me?’

Gemma was coming out of the spell considerably quicker than expected.

‘Weird, isn’t it? You’ve been under the influence of ultrasound. It’s been brainwashing you for several weeks. This watch is neutralising the signal.’

‘My God, we’re being invaded by the whole of Europe!’

‘I think you’ll find it’s the whole of the world,’ said Madeline.

‘I didn’t care, I wanted the invasion to happen. I’ve been so depressed, so despondent.’

‘Glad you’re feeling better. The whole world is being affected. Every

non-American despises Americans and Americans despise themselves. As many people as possible must be made aware of this app running on this watch. There are only nine days before the ships reach your shore,' said Madeline.

She was aware that her spiel was becoming a little repetitive.

'Tall order then,' said Gemma.

'That's what everybody keeps saying,' said Madeline.

'What can I do?'

'We need to get to the top and work downwards. We've borrowed these ear devices, they filter out the ultrasound.'

Adam showed her a small bag full of ear devices.

'They want cleaning,' said Adam.

'They aren't going to go very far,' said Gemma.

'No, you're right, any ideas?' said Madeline.

Gemma pondered for a moment and then made a snap decision, 'We need to get to the president.'

It was at this point that Madeline realised that Minneapolis wasn't the most ideal place to be. It was well over a thousand miles away from the east of the continent, where important and influential people were likely to be found. Ideally, Washington was where they needed to go.

'We need a Learjet,' Gemma stated more than suggested.

'Yes, if only,' said Adam.

They were strapped for time but Gemma invited them inside. She needed to get ready. She hadn't been an active agent for over eight years but she kept herself prepared just in case her dormant skills were needed again. Despite no longer being in her prime of life, she was still slim, fit and very attractive. Madeline was aware of the possible rivalry that may ensue but she was perfectly okay with it. On balance though, she did have a substantial edge over most human females.

Adam cleaned up the ear devices as best he could while he waited. Ideally, they wanted jet washing and bleaching but there was no time for that.

She emerged in secret agent mode, dressed smartly all in black wearing very bold makeup, enough to intimidate most Avon representatives. To complete the secret agent theme, her pockets were filled with gadgets galore.

‘First stop, Zol Pidem, a good friend of mine. He’s a billionaire and owns a Learjet,’ said Gemma.

Gemma pushed the ear devices deep into her ears before setting off in Adam’s hire car.

Zol Pidem lived on his own apart from his butler, a team of cooks, cleaners, gardeners, estate managers and maids. His house was modestly based on a seventeenth-century baroque style French chateaux with more wings than a KFC bargain bucket. So long was his gravel drive that the entrance gates and the elegant carved walnut double entrance doors were in different zip codes (postcodes).

The butler answered the door, hanging on to two raging Dobermans who dearly wanted to eat something, preferably human. Clearly, the effects of the ultrasound weighed heavily on his composure. So deeply immersed in his sombre thoughts it was clearly an effort to talk or raise his eyes from the floor. Madeline’s app was running on her super watch but this was one occasion where it was hard to see how it was going to make any difference.

‘Is Zol in? Will you tell him it’s Gemma, Gemma Bream?’

The butler disappeared, leaving them all perched at the grand entrance. As they had no idea what he had done with the Dobermans, Madeline kept her laser finger ready on standby. She did her best to hide her damaged hands and the hinged down section of her laser finger. No doubt Gemma would eventually find out that Madeline was a highly sophisticated android brimming with weapons, cunning and sex appeal. For now, though, Madeline was comfortable in taking a back step and letting Gemma do all the work.

Eventually, Zol came to the door – a tall, grey-haired man in his Fifties.

‘Oh, hi Gemma, I’m having a bad day. Call me in a week or two,’ he said quietly.

For the moment he was not particularly thrilled to see Gemma. He wouldn’t have been thrilled to see Elvis or even his long-lost daughter – if he had one. However, Madeline’s watch app was running, it was imminent that the gloom and depression would pass any second. He was about to slam the door in their faces when a wave of joy engulfed him. He slowly turned around.

‘Gemma! What a lovely surprise, come in, come in! Come and have some canapés and perhaps high tea later, bring your friends,’ said Zol.

‘No time, the USA is about to be invaded. Don’t suppose you could give us a lift to Washington?’ asked Gemma.

‘My God, you’re right, I’ve just realised, the invasion. Why hasn’t it bothered me before now?’

‘Because of an ultrasound signal you’ve been subliminally hearing. It’s been brainwashing you. An app on this watch is neutralising the signal,’ interrupted Madeline.

‘I was in the same frame of mind. This is Madeline Bull, British agent, MI7 and this is…,’ hesitated Gemma.

Gemma wasn’t exactly sure how to introduce Adam so she didn’t.

‘MI7? No such thing. So, you want a lift to Washington? No prob! The Learjet is around the back,’ said Zol nonchalantly.

26. A splendid front lawn

Madeline and Adam thought they had lost something in translation from British English to American English but they hadn't. They walked into the grand hall with an absurdly wide marble staircase before them.

'This way, this way, hurry!' shouted Zol Pidem.

They entered another huge room exorbitantly garnished with a whole mine's worth of gold, in leaf form. In the centre, there was a moving walkway. They all got on board. Zol got out his diamond-encrusted mobile phone, pressed it a few times and the walkway sped up to a dangerous speed.

'Hang on!' Zol shouted.' Be there in a minute.'

The walkway sped them through five other splendorous rooms until finally emerging at the rear of the building. Madeline and Adam gasped. *Back garden* was not an apt description for what greeted them. Amid the beautifully laid out gardens were two of the largest water fountains they had ever seen cascading coloured water into heart-shaped lakes beneath. Between the two lakes and perfectly manicured lawns was a runway with a Learjet casually parked up, all polished and glistening in the sunshine. Zol used his mobile phone again.

'Grayling, co-pilot duties please.'

Within seconds Grayling appeared suitably dressed as a co-pilot should be. His depression finally lifted – the app had taken effect. Either that or it was because he preferred co-pilot duties to polishing the silver.

'Where to, today sir?' he said cheerfully.

'Washington,' said Zol.

'Very good Sir.'

It was a thousand-mile trip which equated to a little over a couple of hours at full throttle in the Learjet. Once in the air Grayling took the controls and Zol reacquainted himself with Gemma. Madeline and Adam gave them space. Clearly, an old flame was still flickering. They gazed into each other's eyes and eventually held each other's hands.

Madeline and Adam decided to do the same. Everyone felt sorry for Grayling.

'Oh, by the way, brought something I thought you might need. You left it in *my* car,' said Adam, fully aware that Madeline had designs on it.

He reached into his pocket and took out a small zip-up bag. It was her repair kit.

'Thank goodness, you're a saint.'

Madeline opened up the bag and took out a small pot of flesh-toned special silicone-based cement composite and an applicator. Out of sight of Zol and Gemma, she spent the next half hour repairing her damaged hands.

'There, how's that?'

'Perfect!' said Adam.

Madeline now turned her attention to more pertinent matters: she was on a mission and she had responsibilities. She also had Alf's mobile phone. Presumably, one of the phone numbers in the call log had to be the number of the MI7 traitor. How else would he and his men have known about Madeline? It was time to contact Nuttall.

'Nuttall, are you there?' said Madeline talking into her super watch.

'Hello Madeline, got any good news to tell me?'

'No, bad! Are we safe to talk?'

'Hang on… okay, go ahead.'

'Had a party waiting for me. They seemed to be well informed.'

'Right, okay. I understand.'

'Sending you a list of phone numbers, from the ring leader's mobile phone.'

'Okay, thanks. This is getting a bit tiresome. All my staff were supposed to have been fully vetted.'

'Leave it with you. Have to go, we have an important engagement.'

'Right, with the President I suppose!' Nuttall chuckled.

'Got it in one.'

By the time Madeline had discretely recharged herself using one of the plane's power sockets, the skyscrapers of Washington DC were rapidly approaching.

‘Zol, what length runway do you need to land this thing?’ asked Madeline.

‘For a bet, landed it once in 150 yards!’

‘Think you could do it in 115?’

‘Where have you got in mind?’

‘South lawn!’

‘Zol! No! Don’t even think about it,’ Gemma pleaded.

‘I am thinking about it! I’m always up for a challenge,’ said Zol boldly, then promptly returned to the cockpit.

‘What’s all that about – the south lawn?’ asked Adam.

‘Basically, it’s the White House’s front garden,’ explained Madeline.

Zol circled the plane as low as he dared, around the grounds of the White House. Ideally, the lawn had to be clear of people, dogs and pigeons. All but the pigeons seemed to get the message. With only a hundred feet or so above the ground, the scream of the two jet engines in reverse thrust deafened everything with ears. It was an unusual sight, nothing like this had ever happened before. Especially, such a short distance above the White House. No one was particularly bothered about it being a terrorist attack – which it easily could have been. Everyone was unknowingly under the influence of the ultrasound signal and hated themselves. In reality, most of them wouldn’t have cared if the Learjet landed on top of them.

The verdict was that it was going to be tight. Over the intercom, Zol told everyone to belt up as he lined the plane up for the ridiculously short approach. The speed and angle were critical. If he got it wrong, at best he could try again, at worst the plane would make a serious mess of the large white building rapidly approaching. The plane slowed to such an extent that it was dangerously approaching stall speed. To onlookers, the plane almost appeared to be standing still in the air, hovering mystically above the ground. The monument glided slowly past to their right – they were committed. The ground came in close and the South Lawn was immediately in front of them. The approach angle had to be unusually steep, consequently, the landing was heavy on the wet soft grass. The wheel brakes had little effect in slowing down the plane. It was mostly down to the reverse thrusters. The engines howled. It was no way to treat a 20-million-dollar Learjet. Zol was committed – the end of the lawn was rapidly approaching. Everyone held their breaths, even Poppy in her tank. Fifty, forty, thirty, twenty, ten yards to go and then finally the whole plane nosedived to a grinding halt with the wheel brakes. Zol had downed

the Learjet in a record-breaking short distance.

‘How’s that!’ cheered Zol over the intercom.

‘We’re all going to get arrested now, you do know that, don’t you,’ said Adam.

‘That’s the plan,’ said Madeline.

Sure enough, a dozen or so, despondent, moody, irritable President’s special armed police were waiting as they alighted. Madeline wanted to say, take me to your leader. That would have speeded things up a little but no one was in any mood for frivolities. All five were taken into a holding room in the east wing of the White House ready to be professionally interrogated. It was, after all, a pretty serious act of wilful damage. Not every day did a Learjet land on the President’s front garden and leave ugly ruts in what used to be a perfectly manicured lawn.

There was now an overdue matter that Madeline needed to be addressed before the interrogations started. For the last few hours, Gemma thought she was the spokesperson, the one in charge and the one who would save America. She was completely unaware of Madeline’s incredible abilities, her weaponry, her feistiness and her success rate in exterminating international bad guys. A scantily clad, gorgeous seductress with a jaw-dropping figure and oversized Barbie doll eyes, would surely get in the way. Madeline naturally wanted to avoid making a scene or humiliating her, that would be improper. Thanks to Gemma, they were where they were, in record time. The best way was to just show her.

‘Gemma there’s something you need to know about me,’ said Madeline.

‘Don’t tell me, you’re pregnant!’ said Gemma patronisingly.

Madeline was taken aback. She certainly didn’t expect her to say that.

‘Why would you think that?’ snapped Madeline.

‘Ooh, now, where do I start? The dilated pupils, the heavy breathing, strange eating habits… shall I go on?’

‘I’m afraid you’re way off the mark. I can do many things but getting pregnant is one thing I can’t do… unless there’s something my makers haven’t told me.’

‘Your makers?’ sparked Gemma, trying not to appear annoyed.

She clearly was though. They were in this highly critical situation and this floozy, Madeline, was babbling about her makers.

‘Yes, my makers. I want you all to stay here and keep your ear devices in. Only I can do this now.’

‘Do what exactly!?’ said Gemma, aghast.

Madeline rubbed her thumb and forefinger together.

‘This…’

A powerful blazing blue-green light fired out of Madeline's laser finger towards the door lock. This time the laser was on full power, not stun and the effects were dramatic. The severely singed door gently opened on its own accord and then Grayling fainted on his own accord. Gemma and Zol impulsively held each other tightly.

‘Won’t be long,’ said Madeline calmly. ‘Adam, Sweetheart, explain it to them while I’m gone.’

27. Finding the President

This was probably going to be the most confrontational thing Madeline had ever done. She, quite rightly, expected many issues with boldly walking into the White House and asking to see the President. Normally, she would have tried this approach, but the officious security staff were wallowing in so much dejection and misery that they were utterly unhelpful. Clearly, she would have to do it the hard and painful way. Getting in was easy, the lower floor area was open to the public. However, because of the unprecedented private jet on the lawn and five suspected terrorists detained, everyone was overly frisked.

Several times before, Madeline had been frisked and the effect was always predictable, however, this time it was done by a moody, despairing, overbearing woman. Madeline thought it wise to turn off her ultrasound masking app.

'Moody despairing people may be easier to handle,' she thought.

The moody woman naturally failed to get aroused, she just dribbled a little. Madeline was eventually let in after her vital charging lead had been thoroughly examined and slobbered on by an explosive detection dog. The miserable guide babbled to the miserable group of female tourists and eventually told them what Madeline wanted to know.

'The upper floors are known as "the residence". This is where the President and his family live…'

'Excuse me, how do you access the upper floors, up these stairs?' suggested Madeline coyly.

'Certainly not! They use the lifts for security reasons,' the guide bawled back.

Madeline waited for the guide and tourists to move on and then approached the foot of the grand stairway. As the stairs were only guarded by a mere four female security staff, a touch of sleeping gas should handle the situation nicely but she had to get close to them. They were surprisingly alert and instantly four handguns were menacingly pointing at her. She knew her flirting and seduction skills were not going to work this time.

‘Stand back madam or we *will* fire,’ said an especially grouchy security guard.

Madeline ignored them.

‘Last chance madam, stand back or we *will* fire!’

She continued to move still closer. Then a bullet bounced off her leg. A few seconds passed and then another bullet bounced off her other leg.

‘Ladies, ladies, control yourselves… oops, pardon me!’

Madeline had farted. Moments later, four security women were in a heap at the foot of the stairs, sleeping like babies. She had to be quick, she dashed up the flight of stairs. Meanwhile, the gunfire had alerted the other security guards and to make matters worse, the tourist party were now screaming and flooding back into the room. Mayhem then ensued which was exactly what Madeline wanted.

The President was somewhere on the upper floor, that much she knew but exactly where was unclear. She had little hope of accidentally stumbling on his location in such an enormous building. A plan quickly formed in her head. ‘Let the security guards take me to the President,’ she thought. That’s where the security guards would think she was heading, so she would just follow them. Unfortunately for this plan to work, she had to hide and let them get in front. She had demonstrated previously that she could squeeze her amazingly flexible and pliant body into the smallest of places. Then it was a washroom locker but it was doubtful if the White House had such mundane things. Finally, she found an unlocked door. She darted in hoping that the guards would pass by. A couple did, but clearly, the rest had split up and gone in various directions. Time for a rethink. Fortuitously, she just happened to be in some kind of security room with banks of CCTV monitors and to add to her good fortune, the room was presently unoccupied. This was a blatant failing considering there was currently a breach of security. None of the monitors appeared to be trained on the President and his family, which would, of course, be unjust, immoral and too convenient but they seemed to be focused on every other part of the huge building. On many of the monitors, the guards were seen feverishly dashing about. Despite the imposed gloom with the ultrasound conditioning, they were still loyal to the leader of their country. Madeline happened to notice monitor 74, showing a rather elaborately garnished open doorway. A female guard could be seen talking to someone inside the room. The guard then saluted and closed the door.

That was it! Who else would she be saluting to but the President? All

she had to do was find where camera 74 was situated and Bob's your uncle. Now though, she had to hide and quickly, guards could be heard racing down the corridor. No time to squeeze herself into something so she hid as best as she could behind a filing cabinet. Two security women entered the room and sat down in front of the monitors. Their names happened to be Huchen and Haddock.

'She has to be somewhere. One of the cameras is bound to pick her up,' said Haddock.

'She doesn't stand a chance, we'll get her!' said Huchen.

Madeline had already activated the app on her super watch. Consequently, a couple of minutes later…

'Strange, this invasion, you know, the one that's on its way to us? It's suddenly started to freak me out,' said Huchen.

'Holy shit, me too! Why hasn't it bothered me before now?' said Haddock.

'Do you think the President has it in hand?'

'Damn well hope so!'

'Sorry to disappoint you ladies but, no, he hasn't,' interrupted Madeline emerging from behind the filing cabinets.

Haddock scrambled to reach her handgun.

'She's the woman they're after!' bleated Huchen.

'You're right, give the woman a gold star. Let me introduce myself, I'm Madeline Bull, British agent, MI7.'

'Stay there, lady! Huchen, sound the alarm!' Haddock bawled.

'Please don't do that or I'll have to zap you,' said Madeline calmly.

'Oh yes, where's your gun?' Haddock continued to bawl.

'Being as you asked, at the end of my cute little finger.'

The green beam fizzled out of Madeline's fingertip and lit up Huchen's rather large torso. She slumped forward onto the desk leaving Haddock aghast and trembling.

'Don't worry, I've only stunned her,' said Madeline.

'Who… what the shit are you!?' screamed Haddock.

'I've told you, Madeline Bull. Now think carefully. Have you noticed anything odd that's happened in the last few moments, apart from me and the laser beam?'

‘You won’t get away with this!’

‘Okay, I’ll answer the question for you. You weren’t bothered about the invasion but now you are. You despised your country, now you don’t. You were depressed and angry, now you’re just angry.’

Haddock thought about it for a few seconds and realised she was right.

‘What the hell is going on?’

‘The whole of the world is being conditioned to hate the USA and the American people. You have been conditioned to hate yourselves. There’s a widespread ultrasound signal that’s brainwashing everyone. An app running on this wristwatch is blocking the signal. You are now thinking rationally and normal again.’ explained Madeline for the umpteenth time.

‘Load of bollocks!’ said the security guard Haddock, in complete denial.

‘Look, you have two choices, either I stun you and I do it on my own or you listen and help me. The President is also under the influence of this brainwashing. That’s why he isn’t doing anything about the invasion. The British government have sent me to try and break you all, out of this state of mind.’

Of course, Madeline wasn’t exactly sure who’d sent her on this mission. On reflection, it was more herself, than MI7 or Nuttall or any part of the government.

‘I think you need serious help,’ said Haddock.

‘Have it your own way. Just tell me how to get to camera 74 then, please?’

‘Go to hell!’

You had to admire Haddock. She was utterly brave and foolhardy to the end. No doubt her training had paid off. Unfortunately for her, she swiftly joined Huchen, slumped across her desk in front of the monitors.

Before Madeline ventured outside the small security room, she wondered if any database she had access to, would give away the CCTV camera locations in the White House. It was highly unlikely but regardless, she manipulated her thumb and forefinger to access her database menu on her left eye viewing screen. As she expected, nothing specific about the cameras was documented but remarkably she did find a detailed floor plan of the building. ‘How useful but how improbable,’ she thought. Unfortunately, Madeline was hopeless with

plans and directions, so it was of little use.

Madeline had to get from the CCTV room to the President's room. It was an almost impossible task, especially with the number of guards about, but predictably, she had another plan.

She couldn't help but notice that, for some unfathomable reason, there was a glaring imbalance. There were far more women White House guards than men. Even most of the tourists were women – very strange. Perhaps it was because far more women than men had applied for the jobs or perhaps it was because the President preferred to work with women more than men. Whatever the reason, these women guards were certainly dedicated to their duties. No doubt they were handpicked. The sort that takes no prisoners, just shoots first and asks questions later. However, women have weaknesses very different from men. This was a situation where one of these particular weaknesses could be exploited. Madeline had noticed that the CCTV room also contained the public-address system where speech and music could be piped throughout the entire building. With a few thumb and forefinger motions, she selected a particular music file from her vast entertainment archive and blue-toothed it across to the audio equipment.

A couple of minutes later *'Waterloo'*, the first track from the album *'ABBA singles collection 1972 – 1982'* blasted out of all of the monitor speakers throughout the White House. *'SOS'* then followed. The guards were mellowing to the beat. *'Mamma Mia'* was next. The guards couldn't help themselves, they were swaying, jiggling and waving their arms in the air. *Take a chance on me* and *Thank you for the music* came next. The guards couldn't resist. It is a well-known fact that most middle-aged women find it impossible not to dance to ABBA music. By the time *Dancing Queen* blasted out, there was no security as such just jumping, dancing, arms waving, whistling and singing along. Total immersion in the entrancing music took precedence over any guard duties and was a temporary relief from their induced gloom. ABBA had brought complete disarray to the security of the House and vulnerability to the President. On the whole, the few male guards were unaffected but inevitably they were swept along in the wave of female euphoria. Madeline was now free to wander the many corridors unhindered. Occasionally she weakened and found herself falling into the spell of the Swedish pop group but she had to be strong. She danced more than walked along the corridors, uncontrollably singing the lyrics but she was on a mission. Halfway through the last track, *The day before you came*, camera 74 came into view. It wasn't a particularly ideal track for dancing. Inevitably the guards began to emerge from their entranced state. It was touch and

go.

It had taken twenty minutes to find her way to the lavish heavy oak panelled door. She tentatively knocked on it.

28. Meeting the President

‘Hello Mr President, I’m Madeline Bull, a British agent. You may have heard of me. Please, could you spare three minutes of your time before you alert the guards?’

She walked hesitantly into what she realised was the Oval Office. The President appeared tired and bleary-eyed. A battle was going on within. Either that or he had spent far too much time on social media. Fortunately, his logic was still impeccable. If an unarmed, strikingly attractive female had successfully made it to the President’s office despite stringent security, CCTV and countless armed guards, she was worth listening to for three minutes. Three minutes was enough for the app running on her super watch to take effect and bring the President to his senses. Unlike security guard Haddock, he accepted every aspect of her story. He knew all about the HDU 4’s, the American version of Madeline Bull. He also knew that a certain android from England was instrumental in destroying the army of evil robots. When he realised it was the very same android now standing before him, he was truly stunned by such technological perfection. He deeply thanked her and shook her hand firmly. Madeline responded by giving him a pair of slightly soiled earbuds to wear.

‘It’s good to meet you in the flesh as it were, Miss Bull. Once again, you’ve done your job admirably. It’s down to me now how I take this forward. I will arrange a safe exit from the building for you,’ said the President.

‘I think it would be wise to let me stay. In no way am I discrediting your own security but until everyone is free of this ultrasound mind conditioning, you are all in extreme danger.’

The President nodded; he knew she was right.

‘The people of the world are not behaving as they should. Not only that, it appears the name Mark Titoo has been implanted in everyone’s mind,’ said Madeline.

‘Mark Titoo? No sorry, never heard of him,’ said the President.

Madeline was considerably thrown by the President’s unawareness of Titoo. On the surface, this was a trivial matter but the implications of

such ignorance were monumental. She would put some thought into the matter.

‘Incidentally, I had help in getting here: A retired CIA agent, Gemma Bream, Zol Pidem, the billionaire, his Butler and Adam, my boyfriend. They’re in your security holding room.’

‘Boyfriend, eh? You really do have advanced programming.’

Madeline was quite proud of herself. She had confidently and professionally engaged with the first, second or third most powerful person in the world. The President immediately came across as an extraordinarily decent man. A red-blooded male in every sense but never once did he make a pass at her despite her being the most seductively gorgeous female ever to have stepped foot inside the Oval Office. His foremost priorities were his wife and family, the American people and golf, probably in that order. This was why he was President of the USA.

He sat at his desk and made many phone calls and then they silently waited. Madeline watched the Learjet being carefully towed off the lawn through one of the full-length windows. She watched Adam, Gemma, Zol and Grayling leaving in a yellow taxi and then, moments later, many top officials arriving in countless big long shiny black limousines.

Madeline linked the President’s arm and together they made their way to the Briefing room. It was an extraordinary sight and one for certain misinterpretation in times to come. One by one, the President welcomed in the miserable, depressed and solemn dignitaries. Even though a gorgeous minx was standing next to him, the gloom continued to ooze into the briefing room. The secretary of state, vice president, the defence secretary, several decorated generals and their sidekicks gathered around a highly polished oval table in the conference room.

By now, Madeline had had her app running for at least four minutes.

‘Gentlemen, you should all know by now why we are here. A mind-altering signal is being blocked, you are now, I hope, all thinking rationally,’ said a very solemn President.

‘I can’t believe we’ve all been sitting back and doing nothing,’ said the defence secretary.

‘Nor can I. We have to go to DEFCON 2 immediately!’ roared the general.

‘That is the last option. We have a few days yet before the flotilla arrives at our shores,’ said the President calmly.

‘Excuse me Mr President, but it’s far more than a flotilla. It’s an invasion force of colossal proportions,’ said a general.

‘Exactly what are the options,’ asked the Vice President.

It was time for Madeline to intervene, after all, she knew what was going on more than most.

‘Sorry to interrupt, I’m Madeline Bull, I’ve been sent by the British government.’

‘Hah! That’s who you bloody are! Preposterous!’ raged another general. ‘You’re that bloody impetuous robot. What the hell are you doing here!?’

‘Calm yourself General Elver. It worries me slightly how you come to know this fact but needless to say, we are indebted to Miss Bull. Thanks to her selfless actions, a deadly war with intelligent robots was averted a few months ago and now she has awakened us from our stupor. Now we are no longer a sitting duck,’ said the President.

It was a fact that certain dignitaries knew all about Madeline, the feisty android (naturally, she preferred feisty to impetuous). General Elver was one of them. The four brilliant scientists who built Madeline had been offered a great deal of money by some obscure American department to make another Madeline Bull android for their own purposes. Of course, the scientists couldn’t deliver because Madeline carried a closely guarded secret – she was remotely controlled by Poppy. Very few people knew this. However, Ron Poultney offered himself as a replacement for Poppy but Aaron Alexander put a stop to that. (It’s all in the first instalment:

The Residents of Wardate!)

‘As I was saying, it may be a good idea if we put our heads together. Nuttall, the head of MI7 has sent me here. At present, he is following a few leads. We believe that a man called Mark Titoo could be behind all this,’ said Madeline nervously.

She was all too aware of the importance her words carried especially before so many American elites.

‘Hang on, MI7? MI7 doesn’t bloody exist!’ fumed General Elver.

‘It’s a secret Government department,’ pleaded Madeline.

‘Secret or not, if MI7 existed, we’d know about it,’ said the Vice President calmly.

‘It does, this special watch is a direct link to Nuttall!’ insisted Madeline.

‘He’s right Madeline, if it did exist, we *would* know about it,’ said the

President sympathetically.

Only one thing for it, Madeline activated her super watch.

'Nuttall, are you there?' said Madeline.

'Hello Madeline, well done!' said Nuttall.

'I'm with the President and his top men. They don't believe me that MI7 exists. Put them straight, will you?' said Madeline.

'They're right, MI7 doesn't exist.'

'Nuttall, stop messing around, tell them!' said Madeline sternly into her watch.

'Sorry old girl, it was a deception. We knew if we convinced you that Shawlsdown was associated with the British government, you'd feel obliged to assist us and allow us to upgrade you. Anyway, congratulations, mission accomplished. You've reached the hierarchy of the USA,' said Nuttall.

'Yes, I have and they're free from the brainwashing. They can now defend themselves,' said Madeline positively.

'Exactly, that was the problem. The American people are in a state of capitulation thanks to the ultrasound conditioning, but we needed the delegates you have in your company to have a clear head so they can retaliate in the most effective way possible.'

And then it dawned with the thud.

'Oh my God! You want Armageddon and I've just made it possible.'

Madeline may have been a machine, but she had to sit down before she toppled over. What *had* she done?

'Is the President there? Let me speak to him,' said Nuttall.

Madeline took the watch off her wrist and passed it to the President. She was visibly trembling with humiliation.

'This is the President of the United States of America,' said the President.

'May I say this is a great honour sir, to talk to the greatest president America has ever had,' said Nuttall creepily.

'To the point sir!'

'I want to assure you that all that has been done and is to be done is for the good of this world and the people on it.'

'May I say, Sir, it seems you have a misguided interpretation of the word, good.'

'With respect Mr President, there is more going on here than you can possibly imagine,' said Nuttall sombrely.

Madeline thought it an appropriate time to butt in. She was, after all, still a British secret agent of sorts even though her present employers were not specifically working for Queen and country.

'Mr President, we have to find this Mark Titoo, I'm sure he's behind all this,' said Madeline in desperation.

Nuttall interrupted, *'Yes, you're absolutely right, Mark Titoo is at the root of it all but Mark Titoo isn't a man. Mark Titoo isn't even of this world. As I've said, much more is afoot than you realise.'*

Nuttall was talking in riddles and making no sense whatsoever. It was time to terminate the conversation. There was an unusual silence in the room. Not for the first time had she lit the proverbial blue touch paper. Time and time again, people had told her that MI7 didn't exist. All she had to do was Google it and that would have confirmed it. Once again, her eagerness had led her headlong into… into… There was no other word for it – Armageddon.

'I am so, so sorry,' she said pitifully.

'Sorry for what? As far as I'm concerned, you've warned us,' said the President.

'Yes, but you now have no alternative. You will go to DEFCON 1. The invasion fleet won't relent, they're all possessed with hatred for you. You'll press the button, they'll press the button and goodbye world.'

'You're surmising now,' said the Vice President.

'No, unfortunately, she's right, it is the perfect endgame,' said the President.

It really was.

'How can Armageddon be good for the world? He's obviously stark raving mad. As far as I can see it, there's only one way out of this,' said Madeline with a certain amount of confidence returning.

'Go on…,' said the President.

'We find where the brainwashing signal is coming from and destroy it at the source,' said Madeline.

It was important that Madeline gave out the ear devices. At present, it was only the app running on Madeline's super watch that was blocking the ultrasound signal. Before they all made their way to the basement of the west wing, everyone had the app running permanently on their smartphones just in case they met anyone who

was exceedingly miserable.

Following the recent revelations from Nuttall including the fact that MI7 didn't exist, Madeline's thoughts were now unavoidably frenzying about inside Poppy's head. How could anyone perpetrating a new world war, possibly have any good intentions? And as for Mark Titoo, of course, he was a man and of this world unless aliens were involved. Realistically, though, would an alien be called Mark? Surely it would be ofdijhe or something even more unpronounceable. Why, right at the beginning, was she sent to terminate those inmates if Nuttall had nothing to do with the Government? Why was she upgraded and made virtually indestructible? Who paid for that? Why the elaborate and no doubt expensive charade at Shawlsdown hall and why above everything else did Nuttall loan her his precious Aston Martin?

It was all too much to take in.

29. Bottom of the World

The Situation Room was staffed with the entire American National Security Council. As expected, they were all very miserable, gloomy people for a few minutes and then their mood lifted like aspirins suddenly taking effect. Everyone had the app running on their smartphones and all, without exception were horrified at the present crisis that they had previously completely disregarded. The Room was equipped with the most advanced and secure communications equipment available – if you don't count Madeline. The President and his men were ready to ask many pertinent questions.

'Have any unusual activities been detected globally?' asked the defence secretary.

'Nothing Sir,' said a technician.

'Are you monitoring everywhere, the Dead Sea for instance?' asked Madeline.

'Yes Madam,' said the same someone.

'Are we monitoring the Poles?' asked the President.

'Yes, err, actually, no. Didn't think there was any point,' said another technician.

'Well check them, dammit!' said the Vice President.

The various large wall monitors displayed the Arctic area of the earth and then zoomed in on the North Pole.

'I'll change to infrared, that'll show up any activity,' said the same technician.

Apart from a few small settlements scattered about and several polar bears, nothing was unusual.

'Moving to the Antarctic,' said the technician.

The map zoomed rapidly into the South Pole.

'Switching to infrared,' said the technician.

The map continued to zoom in.

'What the hell, is that?' said one of the Generals, referring to a faint

red spot, a short distance from the Pole.

The map continued to zoom in. To Madeline, it was exactly like *Google Earth* but this was real-time and all sensitive areas were accessible.

‘Good God! Looks like a small village.’ said the Defence Secretary.

‘Check if there’s any authorised activity in that area,’ said the Vice President.

‘No, nothing at all Sir,’ a reply came back.

The map had now fully zoomed in and the detail, considering the feed was obviously from a spy satellite, was remarkable. The settlement appeared to consist of several container buildings. The largest one presumably being the living quarters and four others most likely being generators and fuel tanks. Most strikingly, encircling the settlement, there was an array of forty or so huge white horn-shaped devices pointing outwards in a perfect circle.

‘My God!’ said the President. ‘That has to be it, the source of the ultrasound. How the hell have they assembled all that out there?’

‘And under your noses,’ said Madeline.

‘Problem easily solved, nuke it!’ said the Defence Secretary.

‘That’s not advisable Sir,’ said an officer on a nearby booth. ‘The nuclear device would partly melt the icecap with devastating consequences.’

‘Send missiles then!’ said the Defence Secretary.

‘Have we got anyone in that area?’ asked the President.

‘Maryland, she’s Ohio class, off the coast of Tasmania Sir,’ said another officer.

‘Ohio class?’ asked Madeline.

‘A Ballistic missile submarine,’ said the same officer. ‘It’s carrying four MRBM’s, just about in range Sir.’

‘MRBM?’ asked Madeline.

‘Do we *have* to give a running commentary!’ complained the Defence Secretary.

‘Medium-range ballistic missile,’ said the President. ‘No time to waste, contact Maryland, tell them to fire all they’ve got.’

It would take nearly fifteen minutes, almost the maximum range of the missiles, before they reached their target.

The screen tracked their movement across the globe. They seemed to

take forever even though they were travelling at speeds up to ten thousand miles per hour. The Officers closely monitored the settlement. No life signs were detected, not to say that the place wasn't inhabited. They would hardly be stepping outside for a crafty fag at temperatures of minus 60C.

It certainly was incredible how the settlement had been constructed in such extremely inhospitable conditions. The irrefutable conclusion was that the horn-shaped devices were ultrasound emitters. Essentially, gigantic, enormously powerful, high-frequency loudspeakers. The enormous power required to drive these emitters and project ultrasound all around the earth explained why there were four separate generator buildings. It was an amazing achievement, almost a shame it had to be destroyed.

'They're beginning the decent Sir,' said an officer.

Suddenly, several bright flashes were seen close to the settlement area.

'What the hell are they?' said the Vice President.

'GBI's Sir,' said an officer.

'Ground-based interceptors,' the President explained before Madeline asked the question.

They all watched as the GBIs and the MRBMs rapidly moved towards each other and then collided with four huge explosions lighting up the whole electronic wall map.

'Any more submarines in the area?' asked the President.

'No Sir. The nearest is Kentucky just off Peru. We could deploy the ICBM's,' said an officer.

'Intercontinental ballistic missiles,' said the President, again before Madeline asked.

'What I want to know is how come they were so quick to react? It's as though they knew the missiles were on their way.' said the Defence Secretary.

Madeline suddenly had the second sinking feeling of the day.

'I think they did,' said Madeline poignantly.

'You have a hunch?' said the Vice President.

Madeline passed her super watch to the same officer who knew all about the effects of nuclear weapons on icecaps.

'What do you make of this?' asked Madeline.

‘Neat! Bid for one of these on eBay. It went for over a hundred dollars. Tri-band smartphone, GPS, Bluetooth, 5-megapixel camera… It takes brilliant videos as well.’ said the officer.

‘But not a $100,000 watch though?’ asked Madeline.

The officer shook his head.

‘Nuttall, you piece of sputum!’ shouted Madeline.’ ‘I know you’re listening.’

‘Oops! Hand’s up, you’ve caught me out,’ said Nuttall through her internal audio.

Madeline searched her pockets in her designer jacket. She found the little jamming device that Barton had given her and turned it on. The super watch had fooled her into not using her jamming device. Now the green light was on and hopefully blocking Nuttall’s communication channel.

‘Sorry again, people, it looks like I’ve been Nuttall’s eyes and ears for quite a while,’ said Madeline humbly.

‘You’re saying he’s known everything we’ve done up to now!?’ bleated the Defence Secretary.

‘I’m afraid so. I’ve turned my jamming device on so he can’t listen in anymore. At least he won’t know what we’re going to do next,’ said Madeline confidently.

‘He does! We’re sending ICBMs!?’ raged the Vice President.

‘Yes, I know, there’s no point, he’ll just intercept them again. What we need is a different approach.’

‘For instance?’ asked the Vice President.

‘Someone has to parachute in and detonate the fuel tanks,’ said Madeline concisely.

‘Absolutely ridiculous. It would be a suicide mission for all concerned!’ boomed the Defence Secretary.’

‘How close do you think a fighter jet can get, without being spotted and shot out of the sky?’ asked Madeline.

‘You’re talking thirty miles from the target and a minimum of 50,000 feet,’ said a technician.

‘No problem then.’

‘Madeline, you don’t understand. Saying we can find someone experienced enough to jump from that extreme altitude, negotiating

thirty miles of Antarctic conditions on foot is… humanly impossible,' said the President.

'But *I'm* not human,' said Madeline.

30. Darling Adam

It was the only possible way. Only Madeline could overcome such obstacles, survive the gruelling journey and go on to destroy the target. Despite all their military know-how and technology, the USA had nothing that could get even close to Madeline's potential. Whether they liked it or not, the whole world was in the hands of a feisty, seductive, gorgeous, British built Android. If anyone could complete this impossible mission it was Madeline Bull and her super android body. No one could ever accuse her of not having self-confidence. Surely, she could cope with the inhospitable conditions and do what was required. She had jumped out of a plane before, it would just be a little bit higher, so what! In explosive motion, she could easily run thirty miles in an hour. How hard could it be?

In her mind, it was all perfectly feasible.

She had no idea.

Sometimes you can get carried away with the spirit of the moment and this was exactly what Madeline was now doing. You couldn't blame her. She was in the company of the President of America and the centre of attention in the Situation Room of the White House. How could she not save the world single-handedly?

There was another matter closer to the heart that she had completely overlooked. If she'd spent a little time thinking about it, she would have realised that Adam was last seen getting in a taxi with some *now* questionable company. The recent discussion with Nuttall had revealed him to be no longer a friend and confidant, but a double-crossing snake. It was he who told her about Gemma Bream and it was Gemma who told her about Zol Pidem. It would be a while before she had the opportunity to think about such matters and make the disquieting connections. At the moment her thoughts were preoccupied with the humanly impossible mission she was about to embark on.

'There's no doubt that you are truly remarkable but you *are* just a machine at the end of the day. Are you sure you aren't going beyond your limitations?' asked the President.

'At the end of the day, we are all just machines. You are made from

calcium and biological stuff, I'm made from chloro-bromine and silicone, but believe me, I am alive in every sense of the word,' said Madeline resolutely.

She regretted that the president would never know the truth about Madeline Bull, and herself.

'Point taken but I have to ask again, are you sure you want to attempt this task?'

'Mr. President, attempt, infers possible failure. I don't do failure. Of course, I want to, this is exactly what the British built me for, and I *will* do my best,' said Madeline doggedly. She was convinced she could hear the Dam-buster's music in the distance.

This was probably the last time she would be in the President's company. He had always treated her courteously and called her by her first name despite her composition and the assumption that she had an androgynous electronic soul. How little he knew. Madeline Bull hoped that he had set an example to others of how to treat artificial life forms. She was glaringly aware that all too many people in her new complex world were insensitive and narrow-minded to alternate life forms.

Madeline thought it wise to have a few quiet words with Barton on her internal system. The upshot was that her super android body could no more cope with the extreme cold than could a human. At sustained low temperatures, her subcutaneous fluids would freeze up, her pneumatic muscles would seize and ultimately her power cell would fail. In effect, the android that she now was, would die. Lack of oxygen was also a problem as her internal fuel cell needed this vital element to function. That was why, even though she was an android, she breathed. Running at a sustained thirty miles per hour in explosive motion was perfectly within limits but would inevitably use up her power reserves very quickly. She would need a recharge somewhere in the middle of Antarctica. Basically, all her automaton weaknesses compared very closely to human weaknesses.

The cold was a simple problem to fix – a skin-tight thermal suit. She would be wearing a standard-issue pressure suit with a built-in oxygen supply for the drop therefore, any human-like problems should be resolved. A necessary recharge at some point, however, was going to present a challenge. She just hoped that her power reserves lasted until she could somehow recharge herself at the enemy base – before she blew it up.

Once again, she was in the air hurtling up through the clouds but this time in a stealth fighter jet. No expense was spared. Nothing was

taken to chance on this mission. The most advanced aircraft the US had, a B-2 Spirit, was carrying an equally valuable cargo. She was a technical marvel but also America's only chance. The only chance of avoiding Armageddon. Last time, her drop was a breeze, a walk in the park, apart from minor technicalities with her chute and her weaponry systems. This time she was going to be dropped from ten miles up, on the edge of the troposphere and have to freefall for nine miles to evade detection. Despite wearing an insulated pressure suit, the extreme conditions would still tax her artificial form to the limit.

However, these few problems would soon pale into insignificance.

The staff in the situation room tracked the aircraft on the wall monitors as it hurtled across the edge of the atmosphere. Just over two hours into the flight, it was time.

'Ready for ejection in one minute,' said the pilot.

'One minute! Well, slow down a bit then!' shouted Madeline over the intercom.

The pilot didn't answer. For two reasons he couldn't slow down: Firstly, because of the thinness of the atmosphere he had to maintain velocity and secondly, once he'd ejected Madeline from his precious aircraft, he wanted to get the hell out of there. Madeline just had enough time to secure her helmet and disconnect her charging lead before the canopy opened and she was catapulted out. This brutal manoeuvre pulled over 50 G for a second or two and probably would have instantly killed most humans – Madeline quite enjoyed it. She didn't enjoy the four minutes of freefall though. Four minutes is a long time to hurtle through the air, tumbling, twisting and spinning.

For the first time, she was sick. *Poppy* was well aware that spewing up in her support tank would have dire consequences with the delicate and exposed interfaces around her. To avoid this calamity, Poppy, not Madeline, did something truly remarkable, she kept it in her mouth and re-swallowed it.

It was quite possibly the worst and most disgusting thing she had ever done but at least it took her mind off possible chute failure. However, the chute did eventually open, perilously close to the ground. Very quickly, she found herself colliding into the soft cold snow of Antarctica.

It was twilight at ground level but the whiteness of the snow and ice made the most of the available light. She took off her helmet and pressure suit to reveal a white, skin-tight, thermal suit. It was specially made for her – it had to be. They didn't do off-the-peg thermal suits in size zero, *'erotic'* style. She unclipped a small rucksack from a

compartment in the pressure suit and loaded it with four things: two high explosive packs, her little jamming device and her android charging lead.

She was fully charged, explosive-motion was set to level three, she donned her snowshoes and off she set. Once she had found her footing, she settled down to a comfortable 30 mph. It was hard going, with each ten-meter stride, her snowshoes sank deeply into the soft snow. She selected her energy reserve indicator in her field of view. Normally, a full charge would last up to a month, but at the rate the gauge was now falling, it would barely last her an hour. Apart from all this, she was comfortable and enjoying the experience of running across the inhospitable, deserted terrain. It was something humans just didn't do, wouldn't want to do and definitely couldn't do. It was also peacefully quiet for a while, too.

'Madeline… there you are! Thought I'd try a higher band. Seems your jamming device has its limitations.'

'Nuttall, what the hell do you want?'

'Nothing much really, just thought I'd try and bring you to your senses. You won't succeed you know?'

'Get stuffed!'

'Now, now Madeline, remember your obedience training?'

'Nuttall, what the hell are you up to? I thought you were one of the good guys, that's why I went along with all your… games. Don't think for a second that I'm your puppet.'

'Oh, but I think you are. You see, I have someone here who would like to say hello to you… say hello.'

No 'hello' came forth but the sound of a gunshot did and then a scream. It could have been anyone's scream but Madeline made a calculated guess – it was her Adam screaming in pain.

'You bastard! I swear I'll kill you!' Madeline screamed.

Another gunshot was heard.

'Arms next and then I'll start on some important bits. Just abort the mission and we'll say no more about the matter.'

Madeline stopped running; she didn't know what to do. It was the World or Adam. There was no contest, it was Adam every time.

'Madeline… please… save the world… I love you… and… always will… my darling,' Clearly, the pain Adam was enduring was causing him to struggle with his words.

Madeline thought deeply about the matter, wiped the frozen tears from her face and began to run again.

'Nuttall, go to hell!'

For the next five miles or ten minutes, she heard the screams, the gunshots, more screams, more shots and then silence. She wept, she cried out loud and she ran faster and faster. Her footprints became deeper and deeper in the soft snow with the impact of explosive motion propelling her along. And then the ground opened up beneath her.

By traversing the snow and ice in such an aggressive way, it was inevitable that at some point, the ground would give way beneath her. She tumbled some thirty feet down inside a crevasse and landed with a thud on a ledge of ice. She lay there for several minutes, utterly still and utterly pissed off. It was not one of her better days and then, for some unknown reason, the word 'darling' came into her mind.

Darling? Hang on, he never calls me darling! She said to herself.

Madeline thought back. Some time ago she had done the very same thing herself – pieced together sound bites to make an entirely new sentence. The only time Adam had called her 'darling' was when they were acting silly in Nuttall's Aston Martin. He must have recorded everything both of them said and used parts of the soundtrack to make an entirely new sentence. Clearly, he wasn't very good at it because of the several lengthy pauses. At first, she thought the reason for the pauses was because Adam couldn't speak flowingly due to the intense pain. Now it was clearly because of bad editing. Her mood lifted. More than likely, Adam was still alive. She would put her theory to the test.

'Nuttall? Are you there? Nuttall!'

There was nothing, no static and no sound. Down in the crevasse, the satellite phone built into her head had lost all contact.

'He's out of range,' said the friendly voice of Barton.

'Hi, Barton. Not a good day again. Don't suppose you've heard from Adam?'

'Sorry, no. I had a feeling it was an edited message but I couldn't tell you without shutting you down. I don't think you would have thanked me for that. I'm sure he's alright though. No doubt supporting a bar somewhere. If I hear from him, I'll let you know.'

'Thanks… Any ideas how I'm going to get out of here?'

'In level five, you should be able to jump vertically out. Your tibias are

made of chloro-bromine, they should cope with level five. You'll need a hard surface to jump from.'

'I'm standing on an ice shelf. It seems solid enough.'

'Go for it then. By the way, there's a sweep setting on the jamming device. It might be more effective at blocking Nuttall's transmissions.'

'Okay, yes got it. I'll leave it off for now though, thanks Bops.'

The reality was always the same. Barton was more often than not, only a few feet from Poppy – the essence of Madeline. However, Madeline was eight thousand miles away. It was a unique situation that she would always find hard to fully comprehend. Despite this, she still considered herself to be alone in the depths of a crevasse. Adding to this fairly serious predicament, the world was about to face Armageddon and she didn't know what had happened to Adam. All in all, the situation was dire but somehow her determination was stronger than ever. She *would* complete this mission and she *would* save the world. When all that was done, she would track down Nuttall and do what she did best.

She scraped any loose snow off the ice shelf and kicked off her snowshoes. She was as ready as she ever would be. She paused for a moment to look around at the inside of the crevasse. In any other circumstances, it would have been a wonderful experience. The walls of ice glistened all around her in every colour imaginable. She shuffled to the edge of the shelf and glanced downwards. It was a long way to fall. Now or never, she selected level 5 explosive motion, picked up her snowshoes, crouched right down until her bottom was almost touching her feet and did the grasshopper jump of her life.

Meanwhile, all the officers and Generals in the Situation Room had seen Madeline fall into the crevasse. Before this, the spy satellite had allowed them to see her bounding across the frozen terrain. It was an amazing, almost surreal sight. They were limited as to how far they could zoom in but it certainly was an unnatural, Olympiad sight. They were now all holding their breaths in complete silence. Telephones were left ringing and coffees went cold. There was absolutely nothing they could do but wait and hope that she would eventually reappear. The words, DEFCON ONE were almost forming on the Defence secretary's lips but suddenly and amazingly from the opening in the ground, they watched her fly out as though she was fired out of a human cannonball. She landed rather ungainly several feet away from the crevasse. Immediately she got to her feet, put her snowshoes back on and began to run like the wind again. They all cheered, then answered the telephones that were still ringing and slurped deeply

into their cold coffees.

It wasn't long before she could just about make out the array of huge horn devices in the far distance. Things were going well apart from being behind schedule and her power reserves being worryingly low. She desperately needed a power socket.

As she got closer to the horns, their enormous size was realised. All gleaming white, some twenty metres long with their opening bell ends, some two metres in diameter. Each one was supported on four hydraulic arms which were rooted in the compacted ice beneath. From the satellite view in the situation room, she remembered seeing at least forty of the horns arranged in a circle surrounding the base. Now up close to them, she could barely make out three or four of the huge devices in the poor visibility caused by the snowstorm. For some reason, each one had a slightly different angle of elevation. It truly was a remarkable feat of engineering, especially in such hostile terrain. Madeline was chillingly aware that she was immersed in powerful brainwashing ultrasound but all she could hear was the howling of the icy cold wind.

Contrary to belief, Madeline had no desire to be violent, kill, maim or even be nasty but regrettably, it was in her job description. She was there principally to blow up the fuel tanks so that the four powerful generators would grind to a halt. However, a thought occurred. Without the generators running there would be no power to give her a recharge. This was something she desperately needed. She would have to enter the living quarters and find a power socket without expending too much energy. This basically meant keeping the casualty number low.

She selected infrared vision in an attempt to cut through the limited visibility caused by the snowstorm. No greeting party was to be seen. Perhaps Nuttall hadn't as yet alerted the base staff to expect an unwelcomed visitor. If he had, no doubt they would have been prepared and waiting with the most effective firepower they had. She had an idea but she had to be quick. She caught sight of a satellite dish on the roof of the main building. From her past life, she knew a lot about satellite dishes. No doubt, this was their only means of communication to the outside world – and Nuttall. It was a good way off but perhaps she could disable it with her laser weapon. She lowered herself into a box split on the ground to act as a 'di' pod to steady herself, turned her laser weapon to max, aimed her finger and fired. It was a perfect shot, the dish exploded spectacularly.

'Try warning them now, Nuttall!'

‘Your precious boyfriend will suffer a painful death for that,’ said Nuttall on her internal audio.

‘That’s funny, I thought he was dead already.’

She turned her little jamming device on, set it on sweep and gave it a test:

‘Let me hear Adam’s voice and I might reconsider.’

No reply came back. Moments later, two men emerged from the building to investigate the noise. Madeline had somehow forgotten that it was intolerable cold – seventy below zero. Her high-tech thermal suit and her remaining power reserves were keeping her body reasonably warm but these men didn’t benefit from fuel cells. Their bulbous clothing, furry hoods and cumbersome gloves were all they had to keep their blood from freezing. They had guns and fired several shots but in the awful conditions, who knows where the bullets went; Madeline’s laser finger was far more effective. Two short blasts of green light flashed across the icy compound and rendered them instantly unconscious.

And then Madeline collapsed. The overuse of the laser weapon had used up every last drop of energy. There was absolutely nothing left. To say the least, this was very inconvenient and very annoying. For the last few minutes, all kinds of warning lights had been flashing away in her vision to warn her of this impending failure but she thought it was like the fuel gauge in her car – just a bluff. Often, she had driven another thirty miles on empty. No other word for it, this was disastrous, she couldn’t move. She couldn’t even put her thumb and forefinger together to cancel the annoying warning lights and bleeps in her android head.

It wasn’t long before two more men emerged from the building. They dragged the stunned men inside and then returned to search the area. Eventually, they spotted Madeline in her fetching skin-tight thermal suit. She couldn’t move, couldn’t fire her weapon and couldn’t speak but she could listen. They kicked her several times and satisfied themselves that she was unconscious or dead. If she wasn’t dead, she soon would be.

The two men she previously stunned with her laser weapon, regained consciousness after a few minutes with no more than a slight headache. They wrongly assumed that one of the bullets they had fired had done its job and killed the unusual female visitor. However, if they’d thought about it, there were no blood stains in the snow.

To put it mildly, Madeline was in a predicament. There was no one, not even Adam to save her this time. All her energy reserves were

depleted and her core temperature was already below zero. How the hell was she going to get out of this? There was only one thing she could do.

'Barton, put a DVD on for me, will you?'

'Certainly, how about Mission Impossible?'

'Perfect!'

Back in the Situation Room, there was deepening gloom. America's most elite watched their only chance of resolution, apparently dead, on the frozen ground. They had less than four days before the naval fleets reached the east coast of the USA. A decision had to be made. It seemed that there were only two ways to proceed: Either to target their entire nuclear arsenal at the rest of the world or just fire one at the South Pole. The most logical and considerate option was the latter. One missile would certainly do the job. It would obliterate the base but unfortunately much of Antarctica as well. Inevitably, this would have a knock-on effect: raised sea levels, tsunamis, global warming, fallout radiation and so on. However, as history goes, when at war, minor consequences such as these are never taken into consideration.

There were a few generals who preferred the rest of the world option instead, for no reason other than just to be belligerent. It was the President's call.

The President and the Secretary of State took it in turns to make several phone calls to the rest of the world's leaders. Sadly, all the conversations roughly went like this:

'Good evening, Chancellor, I hope you are keeping well. I trust our long-standing friendship remains intact and respectfully ask you to recall your navy as a gesture of goodwill…'

'No! Piss off!'

DEFCON 2 was now in force.

31. Two at a time

There were grounds to celebrate. It was in the bag. Most of the population of the world had been fully cerebrally conditioned. Worldwide hatred ensued and it was all down to the effects of the ultrasound, transmitted from the horns on their Antarctica base. They had also thwarted an attack from a female agent armed with a lethal laser weapon – apparently. Little did they know, it was the infamous British agent, Madeline Bull. All they did know was that she lay dead, outside in the icy cold.

Many cans of larger were steadily emptied as the team of four men predictably became louder, high spirited and sozzled. They were promised everything they ever wanted when the project had run its course: mansions, luxury yachts, money and so on. Right now, though, they wanted something else. They wanted their animal urges satisfying. Female company was something they hadn't enjoyed for weeks. The fact that there was a female agent and a gorgeous one at that, somewhere outside in the snow, was not overlooked. Yes, she was apparently frozen and dead, but for these four men, tanked and frustrated, these minor details didn't particularly matter. They all decided that they could cope with the dead bit but frozen was a complete turn-off. She would have to be defrosted.

All four of the team quickly donned their cumbersome suits and began the search. Eventually, they found dormant Madeline, all but buried in the drifting snow. They dragged her back inside and threw her in the boiler room. This was an excellent place to defrost. The room contained two boilers running constantly and diligently, warming the room up to a sweltering 50 degrees centigrade.

The four men roughly estimated that after another four cans of 'Speckled Hen' each, she would be sufficiently defrosted and warmed up for a very pleasurable experience. Then they reassessed their calculations and decided that after three cans would be much more realistic. After just one can each they decided to return to take her thermal suit off so she would defrost quicker.

All four went back into the boiler room and this time had a closer look at their prey. Colour was coming back into her cheeks, not that it ever really left – she was an android. Despite being completely dead, her

alluring gorgeousness prevailed. They had a gentle brawl to decide who was to unzip her thermal suit and take it off. This matter couldn't be resolved so they all had a hand in the undressing. Her incredible body revealed itself bit by bit. Never before had they seen such an erotic sight in all their sad pitiful lives.

They decided that they would drink the next two cans very quickly.

Removing Madeline's thermal suit was, in the scheme of things, the best thing that could have happened. She thawed out very quickly. The heat from the boilers rapidly penetrated her artificial construction.

Mission impossible had no more than ten minutes to go when she noticed her eyelids opening and her arms twitching. This was slightly inconvenient because she would have to put the movie on pause just at the best bit. Madeline hadn't worked out what was happening, but Barton had.

'Get yourself plugged in quickly!' yelled Barton.

She did as she was told. She found the charging lead in the backpack of her thermal suit, plugged one end in her navel and the other end in a conveniently placed power socket.

'The heat has expanded the remaining liquid hydrogen in your fuel cell tank,' explained Barton.

'With you! Like eking out the last bit of deodorant from the can by warming it up. Thanks, Bops.'

She had a good twenty minutes of tasty mains voltage before she heard the men noisily returning. She unplugged her charging lead and feigned being dead again. The door burst open and four fairly inebriated, sex-starved Neanderthals rushed in. Within seconds, all four had their trousers and underpants down to their ankles.

'Me first!'

'Fuck off! I'm the leader, me first!'

'Piss off, me first!'

'We'll toss for it!'

'We could go in, two at a time?'

'Now *that*… is going too far!' growled Madeline, suddenly bursting into life.

Her laser would use a lot of her energy up but a little flatulence would use almost none at all. After an almighty fart, all four were

unconscious on the warm floor with, for some reason, intense sardonic grins on their faces. She put her thermal suit back on and left the four sleeping inebriates, locked in the boiler room.

At the end of a short narrow corridor, she cautiously entered a small windowless room. Squeezed into the room was a large console with several banks of slider controls with associated switches and meters. It reminded her of a recording studio. She sat down on the swivel chair in front of the console and attached herself to a handy power socket. On the top of the complex panel sat a large red digital countdown timer, reading 11 hours, 15 minutes and 6 seconds, decreasing a second at a time. She counted the number of slider controls, there were exactly forty. It was too much of a coincidence.

She concluded that each bank of controls must be allocated to a specific horn.

She moved the first slider control fully upwards. Blaring out of a monitor came a foreign language, perhaps Mandarin. Moving the next slider produced another foreign language, distinctly German. Then another, probably Japanese and another, Russian. The sixth slider produced a familiar language she understood – English.

'Hate and despise the USA. Mark Titoo.'

It was puzzling why Mark Titoo was tagged on to the end but it explained why everyone seemed to know the name. The message then continued in other languages, probably Polish, Welsh and Urdu. The whole message was then repeated. Below each slider were two controls: the first, direction and the second, elevation. Some banks shared the same direction but had different elevations. The sixth bank, English, shared the same direction as the eighth bank which produced Spanish through the monitor. Clearly, a lot of thought had gone into the arrangement of the horns to cover virtually all the earth's surface and transmit the appropriate language. Moving the fourteenth slider upwards, an American English message came through the monitor, but this time it was different,

'Hate yourself, you are worthless. Poppy Cock.'

Madeline was aghast. She violently pushed herself away from the console as though it had just stung her. Why was her old name, her real name, on the end of the American message? It had always been her misfortune to know that the phrase, *Poppycock*, as well as being the name she was christened with, could also mean rubbish or garbage. Clearly, that was the intention here, to rubbish the American nation. She consoled herself with that thought.

Naturally, there was an off switch, there usually is. It happened to be

a large red button just below the countdown timer. Eventually, after Madeline had a little further play with the other controls, she pressed it.

32. Warhead on its way

That was it then. The transmitters were off. The anti-American brainwashing was over, mission accomplished. If only the American top brass in the Situation room knew this.

‘President Sir, we can’t afford to wait any longer, the fleet will be at our door in less than two days. One melted icecap is better than World War III.’ said the Defence Secretary.

‘Bring me the briefcase,’ said the President.

He positioned himself at a table with the opened briefcase before him. Part of it was hinged upwards containing the device for his retinal scan. This moment was never meant to happen. It was always a last resort to use the briefcase. The mere presence of it was uncomfortable and wholly disturbing. The circuitry in the briefcase accepted the President’s retinal scan. All that was left was to program in the target and the job was done.

‘Missile launched Sir!’ shouted an officer called Spratt.

‘God help us all,’ said the President.

The nuclear missile would take just under fifty minutes to complete the three-thousand-mile journey. There was little doubt that it would be completely effective. The Antarctica base would be wiped off the face of the earth along with Madeline who had absolutely no idea that it was on its way.

By now the whole world had completely recovered from the anti-USA brainwashing signal. This had many effects, above all, complete astonishment and bewilderment at why they were on their way to invade America. The whole fleet of warships cut their engines and dropped anchor, awaiting further instructions. What the hell were they doing? They liked, no, loved the Americans. They loved fast food, the Internet, eBay, FaceBook and their iPhones, iPods and iPods. They loved the Simpsons, Star Trek and Friends. It was a wonderful country with delights such as Disney World, Universal Studios, Las Vegas and New York. Were they stark raving mad, attacking dear beautiful America? The TV news channels deeply analysed their states of mind with countless psychoanalysts, physiatrists and physiotherapists. It

was pointless, no one could explain their previous hatred. The Americans also now felt good about themselves. Once again, they felt superior, confident and self-righteous. The world was back to how it used to be but with far more love and happiness around.

There was a mystery, however. Many non-American nations had now detected a nuclear missile heading southwards, apparently en route towards Antarctica. Several leaders attempted to ring the American President to ask what the hell he was doing but he was too preoccupied watching the progress of the missile to answer his phone.

Barton happened to be watching the news reports in the back of his shop in Buxton. It made a change from watching Madeline's eye view.

'Madeline, I don't want to panic you but there appears to be a nuclear warhead heading in your direction.'

'What? You're kidding? Haven't they noticed that the ultrasound has stopped?'

'Obviously not.'

'They said they wouldn't bomb the base because of melting the icecap. How long?'

'I would estimate about twenty minutes at the most.'

As she couldn't contact the Situation room, she knew there was only one way out of this. The mission had to be seen to be completed – the fuel tanks had to be destroyed. She searched her little rucksack for the explosives, naturally, they weren't there. There was only one place they could possibly be, somewhere in the snow outside. Hopefully, she had enough charge – 29%, it would have to do.

She zipped up her skin-tight thermal suit up to her neck and put on her thermal cap. Obviously, androids don't feel the cold but Poppy did. Physiologically the cold passed through the airwaves and straight into her tank. The immediate temperature drop from the cosy inside to bleak outside was a frigorific 90 degrees, her frame creaked with the sudden contraction. She thought about the sudden temperature drop wrinkling her beautiful artificial skin, which would make her look older. The ageing of her android body was something that she hadn't considered before. She assumed that Madeline Bull would just never age – providing she had a regular oil change and service. Herself, Poppy, would steadily age in the tank but this *natural* process would always be conveniently hidden. She had noticed Adam develop a few grey hairs and wrinkles around his eyes over the past year. Whether it was stress or just general ageing, Adam was moving on as nature intended, Madeline was not and never would. The upshot of

this train of thought – perhaps it would be good to wrinkle just a little bit.

The cold and stress of the situation were making her thoughts ramble.

The snow was drifting considerably in the strong harsh winds. Ideally, she needed a sniffer dog to find the explosives but all she had was a broom handle she happened to find near the doorway. After five minutes of prodding, she finally hit something solid two feet down. She dug with her hand and there they were, two small Mars bar-sized explosive devices.

'How long now?'

'Ten minutes, I reckon,' said Barton.

One of the explosive devices was placed under the first fuel tank and set to two minutes. The second bar of explosive she placed under the other fuel tank and set to one minute. In hindsight, these times were a little tight. She had less than one minute to get out of the blast range. Normally this would not be a problem but explosive motion wouldn't engage.

'Barton!' she yelled, 'I can't engage explosive motion.'

'Your fingers must be too cold for the sensors to work.'

There was nothing else for it, she had to run as fast as she could, which in the deep soft snow and 'normal motion' wasn't very fast at all. Ten seconds to go and she was only thirty metres from either tank. Five seconds and she was thirty-five metres away.

'Bury yourself in the snow,' shouted Barton.

She just had enough time to leap into the snow and shuffle in before the first blast and then immediately the second blast, tore into the white frozen ground.

For such small amounts of explosives, the blasts were off the scale. There was a simple reason for this: the fuel tanks were filled with pure alcohol which impressively played their part in the explosion. The blasts flattened the base buildings and created two enormous craters where the tanks used to be. Madeline was not particularly injured but the explosions ripped the thermal suit off her back. If she was human, she would certainly be dead now, along with the four oversexed, inebriated men that used to inhabit the base. Fortunately, she wasn't human but with a bare back in minus 70 degrees, her energy reserves would very soon be depleted – again.

The blast could be seen from space, perhaps from the moon but not yet by the occupants of the Situation Room. There were now only four

minutes before impact.

In fact, it was only when the missile was a mere two minutes from the target that someone decided to glance at ground zero.

‘What the? The base has gone Sir!’

‘Make sense Spratt! What do you mean, the base has gone?’

‘Blown up sir! Madeline must have been successful. She’s exploded the fuel tanks!’

‘Send the DAL code!’ shouted the defence secretary.

‘It’s passed the apogee, Sir, it’s in the atmosphere!’

‘Just do it!’

Madeline lay comfortably in the snow and watched the nuclear missile explode several miles above her. Her optics momentarily overexposed with the flash. A few seconds later her hearing overloaded with the boom.

33. A load of lies

Madeline was *merely* an android, her dire situation would have to keep. Things had to be done: Alliances had to be reaffirmed and warships had to be recalled. The world had been shaken up and a war to end all wars had nearly started. Eventually, the one who had saved the world from this catastrophe would, of course, be attended to, but surely, she wouldn't mind hanging on for a short while. After all, it's not as if she had a soul or anything.

'Bastards!' she thought as she worked her way through several box sets.

To be fair, to some extent, the severe weather conditions had hampered a rescue. With gales and unusually low temperatures, an air landing was out of the question. It was two weeks before the winds had sufficiently abated to allow a specially adapted helicopter to land near the destroyed base. Madeline was now buried under two feet of snow. As her power reserves had long since expired, there was no way she couldn't make herself known to her rescuers. Fortunately, one of the rescuers found the wooden broom handle. It had survived the blasts, proving that you can't beat nature's own materials for strength and durability. They had no idea where she was so they started at ground zero and worked outwards. As the rescue team only amounted to three, it was slow work. After three hours they reached the forty-metre mark, but to no avail. They almost gave up at this point but after a few sandwiches and a hot chocolate back in the helicopter they decided to try again. This time someone had the idea of using a metal detector. This was much more effective than the broom handle and after only another hour, they found her. She was frozen but not stiff or blue because she was made of strange metals and plastics. She was, of course, dead with no heartbeat and not breathing but this didn't seem to bother the rescue team. Within minutes, the helicopter was back in the air, now with a valuable but dead cargo.

They had instructions.

'We have to plug her in!' yelled one of the rescuers above the engine noise.

'Plug her in what?!' yelled the other rescuer.

‘The mains inverter!’

‘And the other end?!’

‘Hang on…’ he read the instructions, ‘You’re not going to believe this!’

This was indeed something that one day they would tell their grandchildren: How they rescued the one who saved the planet and then plugged her into the mains.

It took two hours before her systems rebooted and her heating circuits warmed her up to optimum operating temperature. Now she wasn’t dead, just snoring. This time Madeline refused to wake up until she had finished watching a particular episode of *The Crown*. The helicopter was only a few minutes off landing before she sprung into life.

‘You didn’t warm me up too quickly!?’ she panicked.

‘No, don’t think so,’ said the rescuer.

‘Good! Got a mirror?’ she examined her face in a small rectangular mirror out of the first aid box. There didn’t seem to be any wrinkles worth talking about. She hadn’t aged! She took the little jamming device out of her pocket. The little green light had gone out.

‘You haven’t got an A23 battery, have you?’ she asked.

‘No, don’t know what one of those is,’ said the rescuer.

‘My Adam does,’ she said quietly. ‘Well don’t say anything or let me see anything of a sensitive nature, I’m bugged. In fact, it might be a good idea to put a bag over my head.’

‘Will do miss.’

As it happened, she was being taken directly to the Situation Room of the White House. All but the President were still there, now looking tired and unlike Madeline, definitely older. She was escorted in, still with a bag over her head.

‘Can someone please get me an A23 battery so I can take this stupid bag off my head!’ bawled Madeline angrily.

Eventually, some junior clerk returned from a hardware shop with a small 12-volt battery. The same clerk fitted the jamming device with the battery. The comforting green light came on.

‘Is it set on sweep?’ asked Madeline impatiently.

‘Yes,’ said the junior clerk.’

‘Thank God for that,’ said Madeline as she removed the bag from her

head.

‘Job well done,’ praised the Vice President.

‘Didn’t rush then?’ Madeline irately pointed out her tardy rescue.

‘We couldn’t come any sooner, the storm prevented any landing,’ said a General.

‘Have you got in touch with the British government? Have they arrested Nuttall yet?’

‘Shawlsdown hall you said.’

‘Yes, Shawlsdown hall,’

‘Apparently, it’s an old folk’s home. No one there called Nuttall.’

‘Did they search the right Shawlsdown Hall?’ said Madeline frustratedly.

‘Chair-shy-er?’ said the Vice President.

‘Cheshire, it’s pronounced. How the hell have they covered everything up so quickly? There was a high-tech lab there where they upgraded me… and the ‘V’ room. Surely that’s still there?’ said Madeline.

‘They found a basement room. It was completely empty.’

Time stood still whilst Madeline thought about certain things.

Nuttall was getting very good at this. His lying had become compulsive. MI7 was a lie, the $100,000 watch was a lie, torturing Adam was a lie, *which was a good thing,* and now Shawlsdown hall was mostly a lie. They had certainly meddled significantly with her body but *upgrade*? The Chloro-Bromine for her bones and the carbon nanotube for her skin – was that bullshit too? She remembered thinking at the time that considering she had been completely rebuilt, she felt no different and looked no different. However, she had repelled quite a few bullets over the last week or so and they did spend several days doing something to her, apart from installing a satellite phone in her head.

Time started moving again.

During the time that time had stood still, an anomaly within an anomaly, the President had somehow managed to enter the room.

‘That’s it then, you’ve saved the day… and the world. Well done, Madeline,’ said the President.

‘You think so? Something’s not right. I feel it in my chloro-bromine bones, it’s been too easy. Such an elaborate and intricate plan but so

easily thwarted?'

'Easily for you, not for mere mortals.'

There's something else going on here, there has to be, and I've got a feeling I'm at the heart of it. Have you still got the HDU-4 facilities up and running at Bangor… Maine?' asked Madeline.

'HDU-4? Never heard of it,' said the Vice President.

'Err, yes we have,' interrupted the defence secretary.

'A need-to-know basis,' said the President.

'Well maybe I should damn well know about it!' boomed the Vice President.

The HDU-4s were the American's version of a Madeline Bull and except for a few minor differences: being male, being evil and being completely autonomous, they were sort of similar. One significant difference though, there were thousands of HDU4s but only ever one Madeline Bull. Naturally, Madeline defeated them with the help of a few scientists and her USB toe. They all ended up in a car crusher.

'I could do with someone checking me over. I have a feeling that someone's put something inside me… I mean, something that's not usually inside me… I mean, not intended to be there… I mean, somebody's put something inside me that I haven't asked to be put inside me… No, that still doesn't sound right.'

How embarrassing, she was in the company of the President of the USA and rambling euphemisms by the bucket load. She blushed as best as androids can. This prompted a few uncontrollable grins from her audience.

'No problem, we'll get our technicians to check you over,' said the President remaining professional at all times.

34. A golden moment

Madeline had saved the planet – again. How could they refuse her? The President organised a helicopter to pick her up. She was becoming accustomed to this form of transport. It was certainly different from the last time she was taken to Bangor, Maine – in a limo, in-between two beefy men wearing dark sunglasses. The 450-mile trip would take well over an hour, a good opportunity to talk to her father figure. She checked that her jamming device was turned on.

'Barton, are you there?'

'I'm here.'

'How is the precious cargo in Barton's Meats of chilly Buxton?'

'Your heart rate is steady and you are completely drug-free now. The gel suit appears to be helping your skin to heal nicely.'

'Good… that's good.'

Perhaps this was too much information, she quickly changed the subject.

'Have you heard from Adam?'

'No, not a peep.'

'Okay, keep me informed.'

'Will do.'

Madeline found it nice and comforting to have an occasional short chat with Barton. He was there most of the time and she could chat with him any time she wanted but she knew it wasn't wise to have too much of a good thing.

A good hour of the flight passed peacefully. She flew over New York and saw the Statue of Liberty. Then she flew over New London, New Bedford and New Manchester, she almost felt at home.

And then the somewhat relaxing and peaceful journey abruptly came to an end. There was no longer any need to go to the HDU facilities as she found out exactly what Nuttall's people had put inside her. Her mouth involuntarily opened, much wider than it was supposed to do. Then she experienced a heavy power drain and after a second or two,

the pilot and co-pilot started to behave oddly. They stopped their idle chatter, sat upright and started saying things like: 'I obey', 'will comply' and 'I understand master'.

'I suppose you deserve an explanation,' said Nuttall in Madeline's head.

'U all! Ooo arr ole… ot er ell?' Madeline couldn't speak too well with her mouth wide open.

She took the jamming device out of her pocket and checked to see if the green light was still glowing – it was.

'I have to admit it was a stroke of luck having one of my men working in the Situation Room. He had a little play with your jamming device.'

'Ow ong ave ou een is en ing?'

'Long enough to know everything. What a nice chap Barton is, isn't he?'

This was bad, very bad indeed. She tried to remember exactly what she said, then it came to her. She gave the entire game away in one short sentence: *How is the precious cargo in Barton's Meats of chilly Buxton?* He only had to put two and two together and he would know everything. Even if he didn't add the numbers up, his men were probably already on their way to Buxton to see exactly what the precious cargo was. She was now vulnerable and this was very worrying. Her mouth was now closed, but the pilot and co-pilot were completely under a spell.

'What have you done to the pilot and co-pilot?'

'We've done nothing, you've done it. We modified your speech system to act as a mobile ultrasound emitter. We can program you to have the same effect as the horns, the ones you annoyingly destroyed at the Antarctica base.'

'You know little about how I function. One thing you can't do is program me!'

'You're wrong, we found out a lot about you when we had you in bits.'

'I won't cooperate!'

'Madeline, Madeline, you will. I know what scares you. For other people it's spiders, for you it's fire. That shop in Buxton, I suspect it will burn up a treat… What do you think Barton?'

'Barton? Are you there!?' inquired Madeline in astonishment.

'Come on Barton, say a few words… please,' said Nuttall menacingly.

'Sorry Madeline, couldn't stop them. They know everything,' said Barton.

‘Shit! Don’t worry about it, Bops, I’ll find a way out of this,’ said Madeline confidently.

As things go, they really couldn’t get any worse. It seemed that Nuttall now knew Madeline’s most closely guarded secret. No longer could she confide in Barton with her troubles and no longer did she have a feeling of invincibility. Once more, her real body was threatened with fire. It was by far her worst phobia.

‘Nuttall, face facts, it’s all over. You don’t have the base at the South Pole anymore,’ said Madeline, scratching around for points.

‘Regrettable, but they served their purpose,’ said Nuttall.

‘Everybody is now friends again,’ said Madeline.

‘A mere side effect, I’ve told you, there’s far more afoot than just irritating the Americans. Let me try to make it clearer for you – did you notice the name at the end of the messages?

‘Mark Titoo? Madeline suggested.

‘Well, yes. Unfortunately, we got the translations slightly wrong but yes, Mark Titoo.’

‘Translation? Nuttall, what the hell are you on about?’ snapped Madeline, she needed it spelt out.

‘It seems that we are now all conditionally programmed,’ interrupted Barton solemnly.

‘Give the man a biscuit, precisely! A name tagged on to the hate America message. That name is now implanted in everyone’s subconscious. It’s a hypnotic trigger if you like. All it takes is an ultrasound transmission with that name and an instruction and people will do exactly what we tell them – just like the pilot and co-pilot in front of you,’ said Nuttall proudly.

The pilot and co-pilot were completely mesmerised and oblivious to the fact that their passenger was yelling angrily to herself.

‘I see, very cunning, I suppose. So, what exactly are you hoping to achieve? Such an elaborate and expensive scheme, you must have some high expectations?’ asked Madeline.

‘You don’t grasp the implications, do you? We now control the world, control everyone and we control you.’

‘Wow! Control, control, control. A true megalomaniac speaks. You do realise you’re insane, very clever but completely, utterly insane. Incidentally, where am I being taken?’

‘You’ll find out shortly, call it our first test.’

This then, it transpires, was the whole purpose of the ultrasound brainwashing. All the world had been targeted and violated. Absolutely no one escaped hearing the ultrasound. The message in the ultrasound was to hate the USA but it now seems that this was just a temporary provocation, just to pad out the message. A hidden subliminal trigger at the end of the message which just happened to be an innocent name – Mark Titoo, was the important part.

There was a countdown timer on the console panel in the Antarctica base which Madeline took little notice of. When the timer reached zero, almost two days before the flotilla reached the American shores, the ultrasound would be switched off – job done, world conditionally programmed. The four men at the base could have picked up their fat paycheck and gone home but they were now dead.

Obviously, the Americans didn't know this so they panicked and deployed a nuclear missile. Madeline also didn't know this so she unnecessarily put her high-tech android body through hell.

Madeline sat back and tried her best to enjoy the flight high over the Appalachian Mountains and the beautiful green lands of Charleston. She had no idea where she was been taken and didn't particularly care. Her thoughts were with Adam: Where was he? How was he? Was he still alive? How could she possibly find him with the control Nuttall had over her?

She had a to-do list forming in her head: Firstly, she had to find a way of finally shielding herself from his communications. That would give her some breathing space. Then she had to make her tank and her real body safe and finally she had to protect Barton, she owed her life to him countless times. She had an awful lot of challenges facing her. For now, though, she decided to go along with this "test". As long as no lives were in danger, she would go through with it. That would be her condition even though she knew she was in no position to make conditions.

Two and a half hours later, the helicopter landed slap bang in the middle of a large military-looking complex consisting of several bland flat-roofed buildings and countless car parks. Madeline had no idea where she was or why the helicopter should be greeted by dozens of heavily armed American soldiers.

'Okay, where are we and what have I got to do?' asked Madeline apprehensively.

'United States Bullion Depository, otherwise known as Fort Knox.'

'You've got to be kidding me.'

‘Our first test. A little robbery.’

‘Forget it, I’ll have no part in petty larceny,’ said Madeline adamantly.

‘Trust me, it’s not going to be petty. Just get out, stand still and look pretty,’ demanded Nuttall inside her head.

‘Gold bars are heavy you know. You won’t be able to take all that many.’

‘We’ll see. Just do it!’ demanded Nuttall.

If that’s all Madeline had to do, there was no problem. She was extremely good at looking pretty, it was her main talent. She climbed out of the helicopter and before her feet touched the ground, twenty or so high-powered rifles were pointing directly at her.

A single armed guard, beefier than the rest, bawled at her, ‘Hands up, legs apart, on the floor!’

‘Okay, okay, patience,’ said Madeline in her usual cheeky tone. ‘Now then, what was it? Hands up.’

She put her hands up.

‘Legs apart… on the floor.’

She slid down unnecessarily into the splits position.

‘Anything else?’

Evidently, the experience of being frozen stiff for several days at the South Pole hadn’t in any way, affected her flexibility or marred her stunning looks. The armed guards were well trained and didn’t appear to be distracted by the gymnastic abilities of the gorgeous provocative visitor. They were America’s finest, specially chosen to protect the gold reserves of the USA. In fact, it wasn’t until Madeline opened her mouth and emitted the subtle and silent ultrasound signal that they began to falter in their resolve. All the guards suddenly stood perfectly still for about twenty seconds while their subconscious absorbed the complex instructions within the subliminal message.

From out of nowhere came a convoy of six hefty black articulated trucks with enormous six-axle trailers. The noise of the trucks almost drowned out the sound of the helicopter taking off behind her. The first of the convoy skilfully reversed up to a particularly drab concrete building in the centre of the complex. Many guards now gathered and organised themselves. Within minutes, a fleet of forklift trucks was lined up at the rear of the voluminous trailers. After ten minutes, the loading process was then repeated on the next truck. The robbery was perfectly choreographed. No one put a foot wrong or a forklift truck at

the wrong height or a truck in the wrong place. Madeline remained in the splits-position helplessly agape as she witnessed the biggest robbery in history taking place before her eyes. She, of course, had no choice but to remain speechless whilst emitting the brainwashing message. It was extremely difficult to talk properly with her mouth wide open. All credit to the modus operandi of the crime: There was no violence, no injuries, absolutely no deaths and something very odd but she just couldn't put her finger on it.

Her mouth remained wide open while the inaudible ultrasound continued to flow out of it. She casually looked around and got to her feet. She considered running somewhere, out of audible range of the base but what was the point? For now, Nuttall had the upper hand in just about everything.

'Don't even think about it,' said Nuttall sternly.

Madeline stopped thinking about it and continued helplessly watching all the trucks drive off the base whilst the guards stood motionless, slightly swaying in the breeze. After a long twenty-nine minutes, her mouth finally closed. At last, she could talk properly, so she said something,

'Nuttall, you are a complete bastard.'

Almost immediately the soldiers snapped out of their hypnotic state, quickly got their bearings, raced over to Madeline and arrested her.

It may have been an innovative and ambitious robbery but there seemed to be a couple of glaring absurdities that even Madeline had foreseen: Firstly, the convoy of six trucks would be highly conspicuous and have a job to disappear in a mere 29 minutes. Secondly, if the trucks did manage to get away, what the hell, would they do with six truckloads of gold bars? Who would be brave or insane enough to launder that much gold?

Madeline went quietly, she saw no reason to fight, complain or struggle. Clearly, the on-site CCTV footage would show that she had no part in the crime other than sitting there in the splits with her mouth wide open. She had to be questioned though, that was the procedure. Once again, she found herself in a small holding room with nothing else to do but continue watching *The Crown* on her internal media system.

As expected, the six trucks were found quickly, no more than ten miles away, all neatly lined up and deserted. There was an overwhelming sense of relief from all concerned. The gold would surely be still inside. It would have been an impossibility to remove, transfer or dispose of such a large, heavy payload in such a short time. At first

glance, it appeared to be a very daring but pointless robbery.

Eventually, after patiently waiting two hours for several top security guards to arrive, the police wrenched open the first of the trailer's rear doors. To their utter disbelief, the trailer was completely empty. It was exactly the same for all the other five trucks. The gold had gone. Not a single bar remained. It was rapidly developing into the crime of the century – and one hell of a magic trick.

Everyone put it down to a trick of the light but the leaves on the countless beech trees on either side of the road radiated a distinct golden tinge in the setting sunlight.

35. A fake Irish accent

In a motel room, somewhere entirely insignificant, a television was playing mostly to itself, tuned into the Vixen News channel. Carol, the newscaster was especially excited about the latest news flash.

'Good evening. We start with breaking news about a gold heist at Fort Knox. Let's go over to Bernard Carp who is at the scene. Berny, what can you tell us about the robbery?' asked Carol.

'Good evening, Carol. Well, this may well indeed turn out to be the robbery of all time. The crime of the millennium. Many of the pieces of the story are now coming together. We have been told that as many as three thousand, I repeat, three thousand gold bars have been taken from the vault. That's approximately eighteen billion dollars' worth, right under the noses of the security staff.'

'Do they know where it has been taken?' asked Carol.

'This is where the whole thing gets surreal. The gold was loaded into six trucks which were found just ten miles down the road from Fort Knox.'

'They've found the gold then?'

'No, the trucks were empty, all the gold had gone.'

'What, three thousand bars!?'

'Apparently… Hang on, Juan Carrot, the director of the bullion depository is about to make a statement.'

'Today, between 14:35 and 15:00 hours, the treasury department has informed us that a large number of gold ingots were stolen from the depository. An estimated 360 tons of 24-carat gold was loaded into six trucks. These trucks have been found but the gold has gone. Scientists are now carrying out tests on the trailers, in particular, large tanks on the roof of the trailers. It is feasible that a mixture of acids known as aqua Regia could under ideal conditions, theoretically convert the solid gold into vapour but at the moment this is pure conjecture. This is an unprecedented event and as yet we are amiss to know why this has been done. Are there any questions?'

'Bernard Carp, Vixen News. The closing markets today have shown a huge hike in the price of world gold stocks. Anyone owning gold has benefited

immensely out of this crime wouldn't you say?'

'I can't comment on that.'

'Bernard Carp, Vixen News again, apparently a British Agent, Madeline Bull was on the scene at the time and maybe involved, can you confirm this?'

'Miss Bull was indeed in the Fort Knox complex at the time and is been held for questioning although CCTV clearly shows that she played no part in the robbery.'

'That may be so Director, but isn't it true that trouble always seems to follow this particular British agent…' probed Bernard.

'Any further questions?' interrupted the Director.

After a bombardment of pointless questions, the camera finally panned back to Berny. Carol was now impelled to ask a much more pertinent question.

'Berny, as a matter of interest, does anyone know what Madeline was wearing?'

'Yes, apparently a short pleated maroon skirt, short grey leather jacket with tassels and high heel grey leather boots,' said Bernard pertinently.

'Hmm, tassels. Must be in then?' said Carol thoughtfully.

'*Yes, and the latest colours, maroon and grey,'* pondered Berny.

'So, that's where you are!' said someone with a false Irish accent, in the insignificantly located Motel room.

For the first time, Madeline was disillusioned, defeated, disheartened and many other words beginning with D. Any one of her weapons would have been sufficient to get her out of the holding room but what was the point? Where would she go? What would she do? She was trapped by her phobia. Her worst nightmare was to be burnt, cooked, poached or singed.

Nuttall was presumably listening to her every word so she had to be careful what she said to the interrogators. She couldn't spill the beans. She couldn't mention the fact that everyone at Fort Knox was unknowingly subliminally programmed by an ultrasound sound emitted by her mouth. All she could say was that she just happened to be there while the robbery was taking place. Naturally, this wasn't enough of an explanation but it would have to do. She dearly wanted to tell them a lot more but she couldn't, not until she had figured out a way of ousting Nuttall from inside her head.

The holding room, as confinements went, wasn't all that bad. She was well looked after and had a comfy bed to lie on. The officers, guards and staff were all very nice and friendly. Some of the officers, guards and staff were a little too friendly. All in all, she could have tolerated staying there for weeks but she knew eventually she would have to make a move. She could no longer have a friendly chat with Barton and her thoughts of Adam were particularly upsetting. A visit by her fairy godmother was seriously overdue. Never more so, did she need her now.

What was mildly puzzling was the lack of response from the top USA officials. After all, she had saved the world from World War III and/or Armageddon, which hadn't particularly been a breeze. She had been dropped out of a plane from some ridiculous height, frozen to death in the coldest place on Earth, shot at and generally been put out and maltreated and this was the thanks she got. Surely the defence secretary, the Vice President or even the President would have straightened things out and got her released. But then reality dawned. This time it wasn't just war, destruction and Armageddon, the US reserves were apparently down by half a trillion dollars and that was altogether more serious. Now the Americans really were pissed off.

On the fourth day, she was told that she was to be collected and taken elsewhere. Perhaps to a more secure prison. A secure, armoured police van arrived and awaited her presence. Just one officer with a large moustache, huge sunglasses and an ill-fitting police cap, escorted her into the back of the van. The van then drove off erratically with Madeline in almost complete darkness in the back.

She had been in this situation before but then, her hands and feet were shrewdly chained up. However, this time her weaponry access was unhindered. This could be very bad for the driver, especially if he launched her into the air just once more. It happened.

'Nuttall, do you know where they're taking me? Nuttall!'

No reply came back.

'Interesting,' she said, assuming she was temporarily out of radio contact.

Suddenly the van screeched to a halt. Seconds later the rear door slightly opened, the officer squeezed through the gap and closed the door behind him. The officer and Madeline were now alone in almost total darkness.

'What the hell do you think you're doing? Doesn't this thing have windows?' complained Madeline.

‘No, but I’m sure there’s a light switch somewhere around here,’ said the officer.

The voice sounded familiar but it was heavily disguised with a phoney Irish accent.

‘Arr, he’ we are,’ said the officer, throwing the switch.

Madeline was dazzled for a few seconds but a large moustache and ill-fitting cap quickly came into view.

‘Don’t even think about it, you’re not my type, besides, I’m spoken for,’ said Madeline calmly.

The officer then removed his false moustache and cap.

‘I hope I *am* your type!’ said the officer.

‘Well, you took your bloody time!’

Adam couldn’t say much for a moment, Madeline’s lips were getting in the way. Eventually, he got a word in.

‘Tell me I’m good.’

‘You’re better than good. How did you…? Nuttall, he’s bad… he’s listening!’

‘Yes, he is and no he isn’t. We’re completely screened, even covered the rear windows up in tin foil!’

‘Thank God for that! Nuttall, you’re a bastard, a shitting putrid turd and I’m going to kill you painfully and slowly! God, that felt good.’

Still, nothing came back. Her head was silent, not even a tremble from her nemesis.

‘But… how?’ asked Madeline, tears of joy, rolling down her android cheeks.

‘How did I escape?’

‘Well, yes. The last time I saw you, you were getting in a cab with Zol Pidem and that Bream woman.’

‘Strange pair. I asked them if they knew of a decent hotel where I could stay. They said they’d take me to one. While in the back seat, I thought I’d go on the internet and find out a bit more about Zol. Turns out he’s one of the richest people in the world, a multi-billionaire, he owns more gold than Britain and Germany combined.

‘So that’s what the gold heist was all about!’ said Madeline thoughtfully.

‘It seems so. He’s certainly benefited from the increase in the value of

gold. Anyway, he's a clever chap, went to Cambridge University, did a paper on…'

'The subliminal effects of ultrasound over large distances by any chance?' interrupted Madeline.

'Oh, you know.'

'Had to do something to pass the time away.'

'Well, his phone rang in the car. Whoever it was, told him that you'd got to the President. We all cheered until I thought about it. It could only be Nuttall on the other end of the line. Obviously, he was still listening in on you. Then I knew I had to get out. The first set of traffic lights on red I made a run for it. Since then, I've been keeping a low profile,' explained Adam.

'You could have let me know.'

Madeline played back the recording of Adam clearly in pain. The sound projected from Madeline's open mouth:

'Madeline… please… save the world. I love you… and… always will… my darling,'

'Darling! I never say that! Sounds nothing like me anyway. Fancy falling for that,' said Adam dismissively.

'Well, next time I won't, even if it is you!'

The banter gave way to matters a little closer to their hearts, etcetera. They both knew they hadn't a lot of time. They had to make the most of every minute they had together. There was nothing particularly soft in the back of the police van and it wasn't particularly clean either but as long as Madeline was on top, neither mattered.

Adam was now completely used to making love to an android. It didn't feel weird or unnatural in any way. Madeline was also used to making love with her new body It was also weird and unnatural which made it, strangely, all the better for her.

'Can't be out of radio contact too long, Nuttall will get suspicious. You know he's got Barton… and me,' said Madeline fearfully.

'It was only a matter of time,' said Adam.

'He's threatened to cook my tank if I don't toe the line.'

'Figured as much.'

'Anything else you've worked out?' asked Madeline curtly.

'Well, that £60,000 watch – saw the exact same one on eBay for £150.

Pretty obvious he was trying to trick you.'

'You're getting a right old Sherlock, aren't you?'

'I suppose I better make tracks. Any suggestions where I should head next?' asked Adam.

'I can recommend Barton's Meats in Buxton. Do you mind if I keep the van?' Madeline gently pleaded.

'Now how did I know you were going to ask that? OK, I suppose you better make it look convincing. Left eye, the right eye's still a bit sore.' Adam winced in anticipation of the pain to come.

Of course, Madeline couldn't possibly injure the one closest to her heart. She put the false moustache and cap back on him, gave him another lingering kiss and then pushed him very gently out of the back door.

Madeline now had transport. She was in the cab on a hard, uncomfortable seat, behind a huge steering wheel. It was almost better than the Volvo. Not being screened anymore, Nuttall came through on the audio inside her head.

'About time you got out of there, got another little test for you.'

'Surely not another robbery? I'll have no part in killing anyone!'

'You're an assassin for heaven's sake!'

'I need to hate my prey first, then there's no problem… no problem at all!'

Madeline may have been trapped in a hopeless situation with, as yet, no foreseeable way out but she could still threaten and make even the mightiest tremble.

'The Reds are playing the Giants, the day after tomorrow. Pick up your ticket at the Hilton. Make your way to Cincinnati, I've booked you a room there.'

It would have been a pleasant drive but suddenly the van started violently weaving along the road. After almost clipping a couple of oncoming vehicles, she decided to get out a see if there was anything obvious causing the problem. Naturally, there was.

'Shit! Nuttall, are you there? You're going to have to talk me through changing a wheel on this heap, I've got a puncture.'

Madeline was surprised at how easy it was to change a wheel. Selecting explosive-motion, level 3, made the job a lot easier of course, but she did wonder why people make such a fuss about such a

simple job. The spare wasn't brilliant, a bit squashy, but it would do until she found a garage to pump it up. It was at that moment that she froze in her tracks.

She suddenly realised what had been bugging her for hours: the tyres on the six trailers. Surely with the tremendous weight of the gold above them, the tyres would squash a little and the suspension would sag. However, Madeline's precise optics detected no difference before and after being loaded.

'Give the man a star. Very clever Nuttall… You didn't take the gold, did you? Autosuggestion, hypnotism, whatever, you made everyone at Fort Knox, think that they'd been robbed. It was all a charade.'

'See, I'm not as bad as you think. I said it was a test. It will be interesting to see how long the hypnotic conditioning lasts before they realise that all the gold is still in there under their noses.'

36. The Reds vs. the Yankees

Madeline knew absolutely nothing about American baseball/football/basketball/whatever. She knew almost as much about British football and that's how she intended it to stay. She had never been to a football match in her life. The ticket would be completely wasted on her.

'Perhaps I'll give it to some poor unfortunate homeless person outside the ground,' she thought.

Somehow, she knew Nuttall wouldn't allow that. However, she realised that there was an upside. If she got a move on, she had a whole day to do a little shopping in Cincinnati. This was a place she had never been to but she had yet to discover a town or city that didn't have lots of clothes shops. Once more, her bottomless credit card came out of her inside pocket. It had been a while since she last used it. Occasionally she had wondered if it was actually being paid off or if eventually, it would reach the credit limit and then just stop working.

Grey and Maroon were her current colours. It was about time for a rethink. Eventually, after many, many shops and department stores, she was back to red and if she hadn't been red before, now was a good time: A small red leather jacket without tassels this time. Red knee-high boots and a short orange dress finished off her outfit. Red was very apt as she was going to see the Cincinnati Reds play the Yankees – whoever they were. She decided to support the team who matched the colour of her outfit. How fickle was that?

After a lovely expensive day, she flagged down a taxi to take her back to the Hilton. The van had been wisely left in the hotel car park. Naturally, she had no cash on her, just a bottomless credit card, so she paid for the fare with Nuttall's $100,000 watch. The taxi driver was more than pleased. He had seen the very same watch on eBay but had been outbid on it in the last two seconds – really annoying!

For a change, she decided to spend the evening down at the bar.

Even though she loved Adam to bits and would never dream of cheating on him, strictly speaking, she wasn't Poppy and she most definitely didn't have Poppy's body. Besides, there was nothing wrong with having pride in one's appearance. This was, of course, only a step

away from vanity but why shouldn't others enjoy the view? Some would look at this as outrageous behaviour but time was moving on, she was no spring chicken anymore. Well, actually, she was, she didn't age. However, it was high time she started to enjoy life even if she was someone's puppet at the moment.

There was a slight problem arising – not particularly a serious problem. Somehow, Madeline Bull was getting extremely well known. True, she had a reputation, a feisty, flamboyant one and she always seemed to be around whenever there was a major incident happening. Naturally, no one thought for a moment that she, a stunningly beautiful, flirtatious seductive femme fatale, was in any way involved with the incidents. Very few people knew that she was an automaton/ android/robot killing machine but they did know that she was hot when it came to fashion.

It wasn't long before the paparazzi were gathering and various News channel vehicles were drawing up outside the Hilton. They all wanted a peep at the up-to-the-minute Madeline Bull fashion style. She had to satisfy their curiosity. Immediate thoughts were that red and orange would clash like hell, but no, actually they didn't. Madeline had pulled it off perfectly. Red and orange together were now the in thing.

She refused to give any interviews, comments or advice on fashion, that wasn't in her job description.

Then she woke up. She had fallen asleep in a comfy chair in the hotel bar lounge. It was a good thing that she had woken up because it was now time for bed.

The next day she had a restful free morning before the afternoon game. She got up late, it was the best night's sleep she'd had in a while. Even androids need comfy pillows. This luxurious room had all the essential requirements: a stunning view from the window, a television and most importantly, a rug. She had read somewhere in her schematics that certain routine maintenance had to be done on her body, especially after using explosive motion and being frozen to death. Basically, her joints had to be fully mobilised to circulate lubricant – a kind of yoga for androids. The last time she did such a thing, she got so knotted up that the room maid had to straighten her out. This time she would try and keep track of where her limbs went. Her hips took most of the strain in explosive motion so that's where she would concentrate her movements. It wasn't stretching as such because her legs just went anywhere, effortlessly.

She sank naked into the splits position and then effortlessly raised both legs vertically, one leg up behind her and the other up in front of

her with her perfect feet touching above her head. She remembered doing this particular surreal inhuman *yoga* position to convince Mikael Ottis that she was an android. Doing this, evoked painful memories. Poor Mikael, she as good as killed him. He would still be alive if it wasn't for her. With a release of pent-up indignation, she swung her legs rapidly downwards and upwards several times to circulate the oil. Unfortunately, on the fourth rapid swing upwards, both legs went up too fast. The leg behind her back popped out of socket/joint/bearing and with momentum flopped loosely past her shoulder and in front of her. The leg in front did the same and flopped loosely behind her. Her soft pneumatic muscles were so overstretched that they didn't respond to restore her limbs to normality.

As is always the case, it was that time of the morning, it happened again. The maid burst into the room and immediately saw the incredible act that Madeline was performing.

'Oh my God! That… is fuckin a mazing. Does that hurt Miss?' said the maid.

'No, no… perhaps just a little. Think I've gone a little too far,' said Madeline.

'Little too far!? I didn't know legs could fuckin do that Miss. Scuse me language.'

'If you could just help me…'

The maid carefully lifted Madeline's legs back into place. Both went back with an audible pop-clunk. Madeline lowered her legs, jumped up and as before, grabbed the sheet off the bed to cover herself up.

'Thanks. I'd appreciate it if you didn't mention this to anyone,' said Madeline.

'No, of course, don't worry Miss. Madeline Bull, isn't it? Fuckin-ell, I follow all your fashion. You are so talented. Now, even more, fuckin talented than I thought! Scuse me language.' said the maid.

Of course, she would talk, but Madeline didn't particularly care if she did.

She was early for the game and if truth be known, she was beginning to get moderately excited. She had a good seat with a clear view of the whole stadium. Naturally, she wondered why Nuttall would want her at the game but she wouldn't dwell on it too much. Perhaps he just wanted Madeline to experience the delights of American baseball, but she doubted that.

After a wild and colourful performance from the acrobats and dancing

troupes, the game eventually started. Well, actually it didn't. Now it was the turn of the players to enter the stadium and parade about to deafening cheers and boos. Then the game started. Well, actually it didn't. Now it was the turn of the mascots and cheer girls to prance about to very loud music. Then, at last, the game really did start. A ball was thrown by a player wearing a dark blue cap and a player in a red cap hit it with a long wooden stick and then he started running.

'It's rounders!' shouted Madeline to the annoyance of all around her.

They kept doing this for a while and a voice over the PA system started talking about "runs".

'It is, it's bloody rounders!' shouted Madeline.

The runs built up steadily and then the time came when they all swapped around and a player with a red cap started throwing the ball.

Suddenly, without warning, the sensation that Madeline had experienced before, began again. Her mouth involuntarily opened widely and an unexplained power drain was indicated in her view. She was emitting an inaudible brainwashing sound. There was nothing Madeline could do about it, her mouth and other bits of her were being violated. She was doing exactly the same thing that the horns were doing in Antarctica, only on a much smaller scale.

Whatever the hidden message happened to be, the effect was dramatic. The chap wearing a dark blue cap with the bat missed the ball completely. A burly chap standing behind him, wearing a red cap and kitted out with all manner of protection, caught the ball with an oversized glove. The spectators went wild – out with the first throw.

Madeline wanted to say, 'he isn't very good, is he?' but couldn't. It was almost impossible to talk with her mouth wide open. The players with the red caps had no trouble as such. Throughout the game, they constantly hit the ball out of the ballpark. To cut a long story short: bypassing the rowdiness and rampant unrest of the spectators, the hysterical babble from the commentator on the public-address system, the frustration, the anger and the opposing jubilation, the final score was 210 – 2 to the Reds. It was a result that was completely unrivalled, unheard of and inconceivable. Madeline was so wrapped up in the moment that she didn't notice her mouth close.

It was something that Nuttall had installed somewhere down in Madeline's throat that had caused this extraordinary result, but, as far as she was concerned, it was nothing to do with her.

'Nuttall, you're just an old romantic,' said Madeline.

'Merely a test. I need to see how effective you are in a crowd.'

‘And you’re not a Reds supporter then?’

Other people were now occupying the same motel room, somewhere entirely insignificant. As usual, the Vixen News channel was tuned in on the television. Carol, the Newsreader was visibly excited.

‘Well, well, what – a – game. For those of you who haven’t heard, where’ve you been, Mars? The Reds beat the Yankees 210, 2. That’s what I said, two hundred and ten to two. Let’s go over to Berny outside the Great American Ballpark to see what he made of it. Berny, surely this is unprecedented?’

‘Certainly is, Carol. Certainly is. It’s difficult to take in. I can’t imagine what the Yankees were playing at, certainly not baseball.’ said Berny.

‘It’s becoming a very strange week, the gold bullion robbery and now this,’ said Carol.

‘Very strange week indeed and talking about strange, guess who just happened to be in the crowd?’

‘No, you’re kidding! Not our lovely Madeline?’

‘Yep, the one and only… As you can see on the playback footage, trouble does seem to follow her around,’ said Berny.

‘OMG, red and orange! Actually, it looks OK. No, not OK, she looks gorgeous,’ said Carol.

‘It certainly appears that she was enjoying the game. It looks like she was giving the players a piece of her mind with her mouth wide open like that!’ commented Berny.

37. On the move again

Back in the hotel room, Madeline decided to check her text messages on her internal phone. Amongst all the spam, one message, in particular, caught her eye:

"Unbeatable for friendly stores and shops, even world-famous butchers. You'll LOVE the convenient parking. Tuxbon town, ready for all your shopping needs."

Rearranging the T and B, the message became clear. Adam (love) was parked near to Barton's meats (butchers) and was ready to act.

A little plan formed: She pretended to search for her charging lead knowing full well it was in her pocket.

'Damn, where's my charging lead? Must have left it in the back of the van,' she said out loud for the benefit of Nuttall or whoever was listening.

The van with the screened interior was down in the car park. She climbed in through the back doors and into privacy, isolated from Nuttall's prying ears and eyes. It was a satisfying short-term relief. She called Adam on her internal phone.

'Got your text. I'm screened, in the back of your van,' said Madeline.

'Hi, Sweetheart! Hope you're looking after it. I'm parked across from Barton's Meats.'

'Seen anyone go in or come out?'

'No, no one.'

'If Barton isn't there, he needs to be,' said Madeline.

'Agreed,' said Adam.

'Leave it to me… Got a plan?'

'Oh, I'll come up with something,' said Adam, overly sure of himself.

'Be careful,' said Madeline softly.

'I will. Love you, babe.'

'Love you too.'

With Adam's past results 'come up with something' could result in several outcomes: Bullet holes in his legs, being beaten up, stripped naked, finding himself in the completely wrong country or even locked up somewhere. However, recently, it has to be said, he was proving to be quite proficient. He had rescued Madeline twice although his shining armour had yet to be tested.

Perhaps Madeline was expecting too much from him, after all, it all started many moons ago when Madeline was desperately hungry and had no one else to turn to. Of course, she didn't *want* to turn to anyone else, she just wanted an excuse to see her lovely Adam. Dying of hunger seemed as good a reason as any. Now things had moved on and he was flying around the world at the drop of a hat.

Back in her hotel room and back under the unwelcomed surveillance of Nuttall and his team, she plugged in her charging lead.

'Nuttall, Nuttall, are you there?'

'Yes, yes, what do you want?'

'Haven't you got a wife and family to go home to?' It seemed a good question to ask.

'No! What do you want!?' snapped Nuttall.

'Calm down, a bit of civility, please. Something's up with my left arm, it's sluggish. I need Barton to have a look at my sensors.'

'Sensor? Oh, OK, with you, leave it to me. Incidentally, tomorrow's the big one, what everything has been leading up to, so be rested and ready!' said Nuttall assertively.

It was very disconcerting that Nuttall now knew everything. One more person who knew Madeline Bull's secret: that she was controlled by a withered, badly burnt husk of a human being, inside a tank. For now, there was nothing she could do about it but eventually, she would have to sort this over-familiarity out, once and for all.

Within thirty minutes, a black car pulled up outside "Barton's meats". The pavements were now empty, it was late in the day and all the shoppers had gone home. Hidden in the shadows, from the other side of the street, Adam watched Barton and another man, get out of a car and enter the shop through the front door. Adam had no idea how many people were inside the building. If he brazenly went in the front way, he suspected he would most likely come worst off. He decided it would be a much better idea to find his way around the back of the shop and find a suitable window to pry through.

It was a maze of alleyways, carpeted in dead rats, bags of rubbish and

ugly weeds, which eventually led him to the rear of the shop. It didn't help that it was almost pitch dark. The torch app on his phone helped to some degree. It was unclear if the windows to the rear of the shop were just filthy or had obscure glass fitted but the effect was just the same. Yes, the lights were on and people were inside, but it was unclear exactly how many, there could have been ten or two. Adam had to act now or never. He picked up a piece of discarded two-by-three timber lying in the soup of slimy mud and decomposed rats and banged repeatedly on the rear steel reinforced door. He suspected he would only get one chance. It always looked so easy in the movies. He turned off the phone torch and waited for the moment. After a few seconds, the sound of bolts sliding and keys turning disturbed the eerie silence of the backyard.

It was a very foolish thing to do, opening the door into darkness with a light behind him. He couldn't see a thing but Adam could clearly see him.

'Who's there?' shouted the man.

'Me!' replied Adam as he swished the piece of wood down on the back of his neck.

'In one!' said Adam quietly. The man was out cold.

Adam banged the now open door again. Just as before, another man poked his head out into the darkness.

'Jim! Are you there?' asked the man.

'No, but I am,' said Adam as the piece of wood came down again.

Two men were now out cold, lying in the cold mud and rat entrails. Once more Adam banged on the steel door. After a few seconds, another man popped his head bravely out. Adam was just about to give him the same treatment but fortunately, he spoke.

'Hello, anyone there?'

'Barton?'

'Adam?'

'Anybody else in there?'

'Yes, Poppy!'

As it was a former butcher's shop, there happened to be plenty of meat hooks and rope at hand. They were ideal for fastening up two men with severely bruised necks and imminent salmonella.

To Adam's surprise, he had been completely successful. He was

naturally proud of himself. Quite easily he could have broken the men's necks and killed them. Then he would have been wanted for first-degree murder, regardless of the circumstances. Favourably for them, both began to groan and whimper, behind the tape on their mouths. Even Barton complimented him for his bold actions – high praise indeed.

To Adam's shock, it had never been a bluff. Barton pointed out four jerry cans containing something highly inflammable, ready to be used if Madeline didn't conform. He decided that his first job was to flush the contents down the toilet. Adam was fully aware that this was irresponsible, illegal and harmful to the environment but flushing the toilet several times, in his eyes, would in some way redress any wrongdoings.

'Okay what do we do now?' asked Adam.

'We have to move Poppy again, there's no way around it. And we have to do it before Nuttall suspects anything.'

It was always confusing. Madeline was somewhere in America, many thousands of miles away, but Poppy, who was *essentially* Madeline, was right beside them. It was easy to forget this anomaly. The tank in which she floated, was up in the corner of the room, almost overlooked and gathering a faint covering of dust.

'Hang on, surely, I can talk to Poppy directly, can't I?' suggested Adam.

'No problem, I'll divert her audio interface to my laptop,' said Barton.

Barton typed a few commands into his laptop and the job was done.

'Hi Babe, You and Barton are now safe.'

'Hello sweetie, that's good to hear,' said Madeline, voice coming through the laptop speakers.

'You're patched directly through to his laptop. Nuttall can't hear you,'

'Thanks, both of you. What now?'

'God this is hard to get my head around. You're only a few feet away from me but you're in America, 3000 miles away. It seems that Nuttall was deadly serious with his threat. There were four jerry cans full of petrol all ready for any disobedience. We're going to have to move you again. Sorry, it's the only way,' said Adam.

'Motion sickness is always better than being cooked alive.'

'Where are you?' asked Adam.

'Right next to you…'

'No, I mean, where are *you*?'

'Back in my hotel room,'

'Good, best that you sleep through it.'

'It's only five in the afternoon!'

'Well, take a nap or something,' said Adam.

'I think I will. Nuttall said something about it being the big one tomorrow.'

Barton tapped a few more keys and Poppy was reconnected to Madeline.

The fact that she had been moved twice before had made the process a little more practised, but moving the equipment that controls the Madeline Bull android would never be a walk in the park. Several pieces of equipment that used to be cumbersome, heavy and individual were now condensed, miniaturised or combined but there was still an awful lot to do.

'Where are we going to move her to, got anywhere in mind?' asked Adam.

'Well, there is one place,' said Barton.

'Scotland? Somewhere in Wales?'

'I was thinking of next door,' said Barton.

'Hah, next door. I didn't see that coming!' sparked Adam.

'It's the last place they'll think of looking, but we have to do it right. Many years ago, Barton's meats were planning on expanding so my father bought next door. Needless to say, it never came to pass. It's been empty for over twenty years,' Barton explained.

The first job was to dispose of Nuttall's two stooges. The front way was too exposed. They had no alternative but to take them the long way around, through the back alley. The going was arduous and slippery, it had started to rain heavily. They dragged them, one by one, through the festering deposits of the narrow, dark alley into the spacious Volvo boot.

By the time Adam had reached his destination, a nearby disused quarry, they were no longer dazed but alert and highly agitated. He dearly hoped his knots were tight and secure. Just in case they did somehow manage to wriggle loose, his trusty three-by-two piece of timber was ready by his side. The gaffer tape across their mouths worked well in muting their screams as they rolled down the steep

slope to the bottom of the muddy quarry.

Meanwhile back in the rear of the shop, Barton started the process of unplugging the many cables and slackening off the jubilee clips around the tubes. When Adam returned, Barton set him on the job of unbolting the hydraulic rams. Without these parts, the tank was just narrow enough to fit through a normal doorway.

The tank was heavy, very heavy. Not just because Poppy was inside but because of the solidity of the tank and all its technical content. They precariously balanced the tank on a sack truck and wheeled it the short distance. It was only a matter of taking it out the back door, along the alleyway for a few feet and in another door but it was an arduous task. Many dead rats and strange insects got mushed under the small squashy rubber wheels but on reflection, things went well. After only a couple of hours, the tank was in its new location, plugs were being plugged in and jubilee clips tightened. After three hours, the job was almost complete. As Poppy's new home had been empty for twenty or so years, it was very drab and in desperate need of a lick of paint, but it would suffice. There was electricity, it was dry and above all, it was secure. Now, all traces of the relocation had to be eradicated. The wheel tracks of the sack truck had to be scrubbed away or disguised especially along the rear alleyway. Bits of squashed rat remains had to be disposed of and new dead rats put back where the old ones used to lay. Then it had to look as though the tank had been taken out of the front entrance, therefore new wheel tracks were purposely laid.

By five o'clock in the morning, the moving process was complete: Madeline was reconnected to Poppy, all the hydraulic rams were bolted back and the food tubes were primed.

It was now down to Adam for the convincer. Barton's father's old and trusty butcher's van had proved useful in moving Poppy and her equipment from the burnt-out cow shed to 'Barton's meats' in Buxton. Now it would serve another useful purpose. It was dark but the amber street lights would allow the council CCTV street cameras to register the dark box shape of the van reversing up to the front door of the shop. The van remained in this position for thirty minutes and then Adam set off. There was enough diesel in the tank for a hundred miles, so that's as far as he drove. The van was abandoned at the side of the road on the outskirts of Worcester. Adam was now on his own and once again, without transport.

A few clicks and swipes and Poppy's audio circuits were diverted to Barton's Laptop.

‘Wakey, wakey sleepy head, you’ve been moved,’ said a very tired and exhausted Barton.

‘Where am I now? I was quite getting used to Buxton’ said Madeline through his laptop speakers.

‘Can’t tell you. It won’t take long before Nuttall realises you’ve been moved, especially when his men have been found at the bottom of a quarry.’

‘Bottom of a quarry, is that wise?’

‘Not my doing, all Adam’s. He’s getting quite intrepid.’

‘I’ve noticed. Where is he?’

‘Don’t know, told him not to call. We don’t know if Nuttall has the facility to trace mobiles.’

‘Wouldn’t be surprised. For the time being, I’ll go along with Nuttall’s wishes, mainly because I’m curious. Got a big day ahead of me. Apparently, it’s what everything has been leading up to. I’m quite looking forward to it!’

‘Perhaps we all are,’ said Barton profoundly.

38. Even higher than Everest

Madeline opened her eyes. She was in bed in her hotel room, three thousand miles away from where she just was. She had travelled as fast as light. All manner of things had happened throughout the night but Madeline peacefully slept through it all. She slid out of bed and stood at the window naked. She was definitely still in Cincinnati, not Buxton or somewhere else in England, Wales or Scotland. Obviously, it was Cincinnati as it was still pitch dark and only five o'clock in the morning. She went back to bed for another three hours.

'OK, Nuttall, what games do you want me to play today?'

'Ah, Madeline, you're an eager beaver. Today you'll find out what all this has been about. Up to now, we've played a few harmless games but now it's time to get serious.'

'Harmless!?' shouted Madeline.

'Yes, no lives lost.'

Madeline paused while she verified his claim. Certainly, no one lost their lives at the ballpark. No lives were lost in the gold theft debacle. The invasion *fleet* didn't reach the shores of the US, so no lives were lost there.

'Four men died at your South Pole base!' retorted Madeline before she could stop herself.

'I had no part in that but you did!' argued Nuttall.

'I had no choice, it was to only way to avert an ecological disaster,' said Madeline factually.'

'As I've said, the ultrasound emitters were scheduled to be shut down well before the fleet reached the eastern shores. Damn trigger-happy Americans – lost four good men.'

'Good men? You didn't hear what they were going to do to me!'

If he was a Wardate member he was certainly an exception. Residents of Wardate usually revel in killing people. She had never actually established if Nuttall was a Resident of Wardate. From recent events,

she just assumed he was. However, he had killed Coley, mercilessly and coldly, proving he could kill if he really wanted to.

'You'll need your thermals again, you're going to Ecuador,' said Nuttall, changing the subject.

'Ecuador? It's baking hot there!'

'I've organised jet transport for you. There's an airstrip, twenty miles northwest of where you are, near New Baltimore. Be there in two hours.'

'And what if I say no?' suggested Madeline delicately.

'You'll go.'

Nuttall said no more than that.

Of course, she'd go. She wanted to know, needed to know, what all the crazy events that had happened to her over the last few weeks were leading up to. However, the tables had turned. Now, Nuttall had no hold on her. He couldn't persuade her with threats anymore but he knew her curiosity would be just as effective.

Apparently, her next mission was going to be the mission of all missions. She wondered what could possibly top almost starting World War 3, stealing from Fort Knox and corrupting major league baseball.

For some obscure reason, most of the world's population now had their subconscious conditionally programmed. What was the purpose of that? Surely not just for the occasional billion-dollar robbery or causing mayhem in sporting circles. Whatever it was, everything was about to culminate somewhere in Ecuador.

It was a bit of a mystery how Nuttall could just lay on a fighter jet, complete with pilot, at the drop of a hat. Then, to get permission to fly through certain restricted air spaces.

The jet plane was waiting on an isolated airstrip within a forest, with its engines screaming, eager for take-off. Madeline wasn't particularly late, no more than half an hour. After all, she had to get dressed, check out of her hotel, buy a new set of colour-coordinated thermals, put fuel in the van and then find the airstrip, which wasn't the easiest place to find. She was chuffed that she had managed to do all that in two and a half hours, but the ground crew of one was not. He threw the flight suit at her.

'Put that on!' he yelled, angrily in some foreign language.

However, his anger didn't last long. Madeline had to strip down to her tight-fitting colour-coordinated thermals – dark puce and light puce. They revealed her incredible figure, perhaps even more so than being

naked. The pilot inevitably started drooling a little. Then she put her flight suit on which, even though several sizes too big, somehow still enhanced her appearance.

The ground crew of one quickly transformed from being a bad-tempered misery guts into a lecherous, overly tactile octopus as he helped her into the cockpit.

The three-thousand-mile flight gave her plenty of time to charge herself up, watch an in-flight movie and have breakfast. True, it was the afternoon by now, but with all the goings-on, she had entirely forgotten to eat. This is surprisingly easy to do when you are an android and have an unconventional means of eating and drinking.

Five hours later and with almost no warning, the Perspex roof slid open, the jet flew upside down and Madeline fell out. Ejector seats were, after all, very expensive. This was a much cheaper option.

This was the third time she had been dropped or thrown out of a speeding jet plane and for an almost indestructible android, it was becoming a little tedious. Exactly where she was going to land/fall/drop, was a complete mystery. The only clue she had was a large snow-capped mountain not too far below her.

It was a gently landing mainly because she fell in the soft snow. She quickly discarded her chute and then removed her flight suit. It was cold, not Antarctica cold but considering the closeness to the equator, it certainly wasn't what she expected. She put her flight suit back on.

'Landed then?' said Nuttall through her internal audio.

'Where the hell am I?'

'Near Mount Chimborazo.'

'Mount what?'

'Chimborazo, the highest point on Earth.'

'I thought that was Everest?'

'No, Earth's an oblate spheroid, the equator bulges.'

'You what!? Garth has eight haemorrhoids and four bulges?'

The connection was breaking up.

'Never mind, just make your way to the summit – can't miss it!'

'Why? What do I do when I'm up there? Fly a kite?' Madeline didn't expect a reply.

Despite the extreme adeptness of the pilot, she had landed a good four

miles from the summit. This was not four miles of gentle meandering pathway but four miles horizontally and three miles vertically over ice, snow and rock shale. She was in no hurry so explosive-motion was not engaged. The views were staggering so she decided that she would enjoy the stroll. She still maintained that Mount Everest was higher. Surely, she would have heard of Mount Chim-bore-arsehole whatever, if it was the highest mountain. Something she definitely would have been taught at school.

Slowly and gradually as she climbed, the sky became brighter, the snow became brighter and her vision became overexposed. Sunglasses were never thought necessary for an android. Then again, hiding her gorgeous eyes would be shameful.

Finally, after two hours, the clouds parted and the summit came clearly into view. There was a little over a mile to go but this was mostly vertical. Her power reserves were holding up surprisingly well mainly because she hadn't used explosive motion. A good lesson had been learned: Conserving on power, conserved power.

She sat for a while, meditating, deeply, silently and euphorically as she soaked up the view. It was a while since she had felt like this. It was almost as if she was on drugs, but nature's own drugs.

She raced the final stretch, curious as to what she would find at the summit. What was all this about? More to the point, what was Nuttall up to?

The sky was extraordinarily bright, too bright to directly look at, forcing her to look down. She was truly on top of the world, higher than any other human being, but she wasn't human. She would let that small detail pass. She braved a glance at the sky, it was overly bright. She was convinced she could see faces in the brightness, shapes of people leaning towards her with their white clothes blending in with the whiteness of the sky. These people were beckoning her. She felt herself being drawn to them. It was a place not like any other place she had ever been. It was glorious, exhilarating and tangibly joyous.

And then it started.

Her mouth opened widely just as it had done before. The ultrasound blasted out from deep within with the impact of a 'Guns and Roses' concert. The volume was many magnitudes more powerful than previously. The immense power drain affected her whole system, interfering with all her senses. Despite the sound being well beyond her hearing range, she could hear the harmonics of the message: POPPY COCK… POPPY COCK… POPPY COCK….

It was her name, no one else's. The powerful inaudible sound had a dramatic effect. The ultrasound bounced off the brilliant white sky and radiated out and down in all directions. Virtually everyone in the world heard it. They all stopped what they were doing, stopped driving, stood still in the streets, woke up from their dreams, left their desks, stopped shopping, drinking, making love, playing football and looked up at the sky. The only ones to escape the calling were people who were at least 1000 feet below sea level. They either had to be in a submarine **or near the Dead Sea**. All over the world, people stood like statues and began to chant in unison, POPPY COCK, in their own tongue. Poppy Cock happened to be the same in many languages but there were exceptions: Poppy Hanh *in German*, Poppy Cazzo *in Italian*, Inso GeeBa *in Chinese*, Hash Hash Gorgika *in Turkish* and…

Mark Titoo *in Russian.*

They beckoned, they called to her, they wouldn't let her go. It was mass manipulation. Their righteousness drew on her soul and demanded it to stay in their world. Within seconds the sky began to darken, no longer was it dazzlingly bright but becoming dreary and grey. The figures in white faded away along with their faces. Clouds formed and it began to snow heavily. Her mouth continued to emit the sound and the wind began to blow.

Now the sky was turbulent. All the brightness dimmed and her only opportunity of utopia had faded. In an instant, she realised everything there was to realise.

The mystery of the name Mark Titoo was now fully explained. Nuttall hinted at a cock-up in the translation feeding the horn that pointed towards Britain. The people of Britain had been subliminally conditioned with the Russian translation of Poppy Cock by mistake. The correct name was sent to America. Madeline heard it, her name, the word "poppycock" at the end of the American message, but the penny never dropped.

The Russian translation of Poppy Cock is Мак петух – pronounced, Mark Titoo.

For one brief moment, she had seen the light. She had seen a way home to Ward 8, back to the world where she was Poppy Cock, not Madeline Bull. Where she was not permanently in a tank but experiencing the world with all her senses.

The message concealed in the ultrasound sound had compelled

everyone on Earth to call her back. Everyone had chanted Poppy Cock in all their native tongues, from all their lands. They could not let her go. They encouraged the white, brilliant light to fade to grey. Nuttall's intricate plan had worked a treat and dashed her only hope of awakening.

She wept, she screamed and then settled into a stupor.

'You evil bastard, Nuttall. You'll pay for this,' said Madeline solemnly.

'Bastard maybe but not evil. You've got it all wrong.

This world and everything in it is in the vast expanse of your mind. Fastened in your subconscious. It would cease to exist without you. We had to come up with a scheme that would prevent you from leaving and going back to Ward 8. We knew the time would eventually come for you to waken. We came up with a method of keeping you here and keeping our world intact,' Nuttall explained.

Reality dawned. Everything was patently clear. Madeline was in her own dream world – a reverie… a coma. She couldn't argue with his morals, he was saving his world from extinction. If she wakened, his world would cease to exist. She would be committing nothing less than genocide on an unprecedented scale. Adam would perish, Barton would perish and even her version of the US President would dissolve away. But surely no one could hold her to account for abandoning a dream. She had another Adam in the real world but that was not the issue, she deeply loved the Adam in this world. He had saved her twice and even though he didn't know it yet, he was about to save her again.

Hypothermia didn't happen to androids but other things did. Thanks to her involuntary outburst, she had used up nearly all her power reserves. With a serious lack of power sockets built into the mountainside, she was going to run out of power very soon. She sat on a ledge and quietly spoke to Barton.

'Ask Adam if he will fetch me, please.'

39. A Honda generator

This was certainly a tall order for Adam. Currently, he was somewhere in Worcester. Ecuador was a long way away. He had used up a big chunk of his savings getting around the globe to save Madeline but she was worth every penny. He would never hesitate, not for an instant, in galloping, sometimes recklessly, to her rescue. He liked to think he was her knight in shining armour.

Twenty-four later, Adam was on board a Boeing 737 coming into land at Mariscal Sucre airport near Quito. The airport was situated on a plateau, nestling between the Andes mountains. It had been a long and expensive flight but he was now used to such inconveniences. He hired a car and drove the hundred or so miles to a town called Guaranda.

It was not particularly a good time for Adam to arrive in Guaranda as a carnival was in full swing and had been for many days. His first port of call was the mountain rescue base. He was greeted with good and bad news: There was a helicopter available but due to the celebrations, no pilots were at present sober enough to fly. Adam had no choice but to find a hotel and enjoy the carnival. Strictly speaking, there was no particular emergency as he knew Madeline would have merely shut down awaiting a charge. No doubt Poppy would be working her way through several box sets or browsing the internet looking for clothes and shoes. Barton was always close by if she wanted to talk to someone. Surely, she wouldn't mind if just for once Adam let his hair down and joined in with the festivities.

For Madeline, or more so, Poppy now, this wasn't the case at all. Her subconscious had revealed the hard truth. Everything about her was not reality but an imaginary world. An imaginary world that was as real as reality itself. She couldn't dispute the irrefutable logic. Awakening from a dream world could be classed as mass murder or even genocide. There was no denying it, she liked her new life as a super-being android. She was becoming infamous or famous depending on your point of view and she had everything although actually, she had nothing. Did she want to wake from this world? Did she want to leave this particular Adam here? She considered Barton as a father figure. Did she want to lose him too?

She couldn't bring herself to watch a movie or wade through a box set or even turn on her entertainment system, her soul was deeply troubled. No longer could she look at the view from the top of the mountain or listen to the wind and rain because contact had broken and she was now just floating in her tank as Poppy.

She wanted to die, that would resolve everything.

A couple of long days later, if she could have opened her eyes, she would have seen a helicopter approaching. Then she would have seen a rope ladder drop and a man climb down it. If she could have turned on her senses, she would have felt him attach a harness to her and the winch lifting her into the back of the helicopter.

Under any prognosis, Madeline was thoroughly dead, although not blue with the cold or stiff with rigour-mortis. No pulse or breathing was normally a strong indication of being dead but this was never the case with Madeline. The rescue team felt guilty that they hadn't gotten to her sooner but it had been one hell of a carnival.

Adam watched the helicopter land and unload the thawing dead body. In their best English, the medics broke the bad news to him, but Adam didn't seem at all concerned. They thought that he had misunderstood them so they gestured with their hands to indicate that she was completely dead. Adam decided that it was perhaps in his favour to display a modicum of grief and follow them to the local mortuary.

High spirits of the carnival were still reverberating around the town which made Adam's task a little easier. He waited for nightfall and then knocked on the mortuary door. A sorrowful story about desperately wanting to see his dead girlfriend for the last time didn't exactly translate but the mortician got the gist of his request. He escorted Adam into a back room where Madeline had been abandoned on a hard metal trolley. Presumably, she was awaiting a post-mortem which would certainly have raised a few eyebrows. He left Adam alone with Madeline through respect. A back exit to carry Madeline out would have been ideal but, naturally, there wasn't one. There was only one way out and only one solution. He fumbled in her flight suit pockets and found the universal charging lead. He spotted a power socket on the far wall, rolled the trolley towards it and plugged her in. This was not going to be a quick process. Adam would have to put on a few performances. After ten minutes, the mortician returned. Adam did some waving of his hands and a little bit of wailing to add effect.

'I'll leave you a little longer,' said the mortician in his own particular language.

Four times he returned to the same performance. Finally, after 43

minutes, Madeline stirred a little and then suddenly she was uncontrollably hugging and kissing Adam. She was far from fully charged but it would have to be enough for now.

'Adam! My wonderful, wonderful hero. Where am I?' asked Madeline.

'The morgue of course, where else would you be in the state you were in?'

Not so long ago she wanted to die and now she was in a morgue. Perhaps, on reflection, she didn't want to die.

'Creepy or what!' said Madeline.

'Yes, definitely! Let's get out of here!'

At that moment the mortician entered the room with a mug of coffee.

'Can you believe it? She suddenly woke up!' Adam cheered.

'Yes, I feel fine,' said Madeline.

Naturally, the coffee went everywhere. No doubt the mortician would be taking several days off sick.

'Thanks for taking care of me,' said Madeline as they walked out of the morgue.

Madeline had just enough power to walk to the car, climb in and put her seat belt on before she died again.

'Shit!' If there was one thing Adam hated doing, it was carrying a heavy android on his shoulder. Many people were about and couldn't help but notice a beautiful but stone-dead female on Adam's shoulder.

'She's had a good time,' said Adam several times.

Fortunately, this seemed to be enough for everyone to nod, smile and continue on their way. Finally, in his motel room, Adam flopped her gently on the bed and plugged her in once more.

One thing Adam was not immediately aware of in this particular small Ecuadorian city was the poor state of the electricity supply in many of the hotels. There was normally plenty to run a television or lights or fridge or laptop but Madeline took a hell of a lot more. The antiquated power socket that the travel adaptor was loosely plugged into, immediately started smoking and after a few seconds blew the trip switch or fuses or substation.

'Shit, shit, shit!' Things were not going well. Ideally, he needed a three-kilowatt petrol generator.

Despite the motel receptionist having a reasonable command of the

English language, she appeared to have no idea what Adam was on about. He resorted to pointing at a power socket on the wall and saying the word generator several times.

'Un generador!'

'Yes, where can I get one?'

'Why you want it?' asked the receptionist.

'To charge up my girlfriend,' said Adam curtly.

'You follow,' said the receptionist.

Adam's luck was in. She took him to a lock-up around the back of the motel and wheeled out a spanking new Honda 3 kW generator. Adam tried to take it off her hands.

'Cuarenta… er, sixty dolares por favor!'

Adam had no choice but to hand over the money. He was pretty certain that cuarenta was not sixty but he was not in the mood for arguing.

'Veinte… er, thirty dolares para gasoline.'

Adam begrudgingly handed over another couple of notes for the fuel. When he returned to his room, he realised that the lead wasn't long enough to reach from the outside balcony to the bed.

'Shit, shit, shit, shit!

'Extension lead?' Adam asked the same receptionist.

Again, apparently, she didn't understand so Adam gestured length, with his arms apart and then pointed to the same wall socket.

'Un extension!' said the receptionist.

'That's what I said,' said Adam getting irritated.

In the same lock-up, the receptionist fished out a coiled-up extension lead.

'Diez… twenty dolares por favor.'

'You're taking the piss,' said Adam, hoping she couldn't translate.

'No piss, just dollars!'

Finally, Madeline, dead on the bed, was hooked up to the three-kilowatt generator on the balcony outside the room. She took every bit the little petrol engine generator could muster but it was a Honda – Adam had every confidence in it. Eventually, Madeline came alive again. She would have to stay on charge all night but at least now she

could talk and most importantly, be with her dream version of Adam.

'It's been a bad, bad day,' complained Adam.

'I'm sorry, I expect far too much from you,' said Madeline.

It had been a bad, bad day for Madeline too but she kept that fact to herself. She gave him a hug and a long kiss. She wanted to ask him some very awkward questions but she didn't know how to start. Adam started for her.

'I suppose you're worth it.'

'Only suppose? Adam, Sweetheart, do you dream?' asked Madeline softly.

'What a daft question, of course, I dream.'

'But, how can you?' asked Madeline directly.

'I know what you're getting at. Because I'm part of your dream, how can I dream as well? I don't know, I just do.'

'You know then? You know this is all a dream? You and all this is just in my mind?'

'Of course, I do,' said Adam.

'You do?' said Madeline puzzled.

'As long as you are here though, I'm real, I exist, Barton exists, you exist, Nuttall exists. We are as real as sunshine and rain but when you leave, we will all just expire.'

'You've known all this and you never said anything?'

'You had to find it out for yourself,' said Adam softly.

'That's what it's all about, everything that's happened to me. Nuttall is trying to save this world in my dream state by keeping me here. Why aren't you on Nuttall's side, making me stay?'

'Simply because… I love you more than life itself. Barton loves you as a daughter. We only want the best for you.'

'Which is?'

'To get better and return as Poppy in the real world,' said Adam truthfully.

Madeline could no longer hold the tears back.

'I don't want to leave, I want to stay here with you!' cried Madeline.

'No, you don't. The real Adam is waiting for the real you. He's waiting by your bedside, calling you. You have to go to him.'

‘No, I want to stay with you, I love you!’ insisted Madeline.

‘I know you do, but you love Adam in the real world too. You have to go back.’

Madeline thought deeply about the situation. She thought about that short wonderful day: paddling in that clear cool stream, the quaint tea rooms, the delicious fragrances and food – really tasty food. Then she thought about the adventures of this world, her incredible abilities, her renowned reputation and being a worldwide fashion icon. There was no contest.

‘You’re… going to help me then?’

‘That’s why I’m here. Remember the very first time you met me?’ asked Adam.

‘Of course, at your front door, I was reporting on wheelie-bins, five years ago,’ said Madeline.

‘No, I mean *me*, not the other Adam. I came bounding down those stairs. Jenny let you in, I think she fancied you.’

‘Yes, you had that awful goatee beard,’ Madeline smiled.

‘We are the same but we are also two different Adams. We’ve diverged, become separate and different. Remember when you said you used to be a Foreign News correspondent?’

‘Yes, you said you remembered me telling you. I thought it was a strange thing to say,’ recalled Madeline.

‘No, it was accurate. I’ve never known you as a Foreign News correspondent. That was before my time.’

Madeline was a little thrown by this fact. It meant that there were four years of their romance missing with this particular Adam. But it made no difference, she still loved him.

‘The other Adam loves Poppy and I love you – Madeline,’ clarified Adam.

‘But I *am* Poppy!’ Madeline protested.

‘To me, in this existence, you are far more Madeline than Poppy.’

He was right, she knew he was. Adam hadn’t had a lot to do with Poppy in this world. Yes, he had seen her as a burnt husk for a few minutes in the beginning but that was it. It should have been good enough for Adam to love Madeline exclusively but she classed that as half love. She reassured herself that it is the soul of someone that is loved and essentially, Poppy and Madeline had the same. It was time

to change the subject and move on.

‘Priority right now is to stop me from being an ultrasound projector. I hate not being able to talk. As long as it keeps happening, I can’t do anything. I will never be able to get home, to my other world.’

‘You need a bit of non-invasive surgery,’ suggested Adam.

‘And where are we going to get that sort of thing done around here?’

‘Not in Guaranda, that’s a fact,’ said Adam.

40. The operation

As Nuttall had the means to hamper Madeline's lifestyle at the press of a button or the turn of a switch, she insisted Adam kept his ear devices well and truly pressed into his ears. Madeline could cope with everyone else being hostile to her but not Adam.

The drive back to Quito passed too quickly. There was never any doubt that both deeply loved each other despite the recent revelations. In reality, however, this was inner love, an imaginary love in Poppy's subconscious. This didn't mean to say either experienced it as an inferior love, just a stop-gap love. However, there was an imminent destination, a journey that Madeline had to take regardless of any contentment.

Her priority was to visit one of Quito's women's clothes shops. Her present outfit was puce and puce – tight-fitting thermals loosely covered in a flight suit. She was a diamond in the rough and no doubt, one day, the look would catch on but Madeline craved once again for a touch of femininity.

Adam loved being with Madeline and loved her company, but there was one exception and that was when she was clothes shopping. It wasn't particularly the boredom factor, which was quite substantial, it was the length of time it took. For Madeline, the time flew by like a faulty watch, for Adam it dragged like 40 grit sandpaper on a sponge.

Eventually, the colours of the day had been decided: She settled on carnation pink and white – traditional feminine colours. Adam was pleased to be back in the car, it had been a long hard day, again. He had developed an intense migraine and was patiently waiting for the aspirins to work.

They followed the appropriate road signs and parked up outside a large modern hospital. The insides of the hospital were like any other: pastel-coloured walls, lino floors and harsh fluorescent lighting. Familiar coloured signs hung from the ceiling for the necessary directions to various departments. The signs were mainly in Spanish but if you changed the 'io' or 'ia' at the end of the words to 'e', everything seemed pretty familiar. Eventually, they found the sign "Gastroscopio dept".

Nuttall had left it long enough, Madeline's mouth opened wide and her whole body began to gently vibrate with the power drain. Everyone in the hospital apart from Adam suddenly wanted to irrationally attack, jump on, stab, lash out and spit at anyone dressed in pink and white. If Madeline had realised that this was the trigger, she simply would have stripped off. Unfortunately, instead, she had to use her laser finger many, many times. By the time they had turned left, then right, then right again, then left and then up a flight of stairs, along a corridor, then left, through three double doors, then right and reached the endoscopia unit, they had littered the corridors with most of the hospital staff.

In the endoscopia room, a doctor and a nurse also had to be lasered. Madeline ensured them that it wouldn't hurt. They replied in their own language, 'How the hell, do you know?'

Adam found an endoscope all freshly disinfected. He turned the monitor on and familiarised himself with the workings of the bendy, tubey, choppy tool.

'Okay, Señorita, lie on the table. Open wide… this won't hurt,' said Adam, vaguely like a proper doctor would.

Madeline wanted to say, you're loving this, aren't you? But because her mouth was wide open, emitting the ultrasound message. All that came out was,

'Or uving is are oo.'

Madeline climbed on the trolley table and lay on her side. Adam wasted no time and within seconds the endoscope was halfway down her throat.

'ee air ul, ownt a idge air ee ing,' said Madeline.

The monitor displayed a typical android throat, just like the inside of a drain pipe. Halfway down, her voice box could clearly be seen – a neat circular cluster of small loudspeakers. Adam pushed the endoscope as far down her throat as he could. Right at the bottom, the ultrasound emitter finally came into view. A ten-centimetre diameter circular device with several radiating veins pointing upwards.

'Oory u!' said Madeline.

The ultrasound was noticeably interfering with the display. Adam had to act quickly. The light at the end of the endoscope illuminated a small loop of thick red wire.

'There you are, you little beauty. Steady… keep still… nearly there…'

Adam operated the cutting tool on the endoscope – snip! The wire was

too thick to cut in one go. Again, Adam operated the cutting tool – snip!

'One more snip should do it!' he yelled.

Another cut and that was it, the ultrasound immediately stopped and her mouth closed.

The operation was successful. Adam withdrew the endoscope and for no apparent reason, rinsed it under the tap.

'Thank God for that!' said Madeline.

'Your operation went smoothly and without incident Señorita. We anticipate a full recovery within the next couple of seconds,' said Adam professionally.

'Nothing to say, Nuttall?' said Madeline.

'No matter, the ultrasound emitter has already served its purpose. This existence is still intact. We have prevented you from awakening from your dream,' said Nuttall through her audio circuits.

On the way back through the corridors, the staff, visitors and patients who had tried to attack Madeline were now rousing. It was all very puzzling to them. How could they possibly harm a hair on her head? Madeline was a lovely, kind-hearted young lady. She had every right to stun them with whatever it was that came out of her finger.

'What now?' Adam asked.

'We have to get high up,' said Madeline.

'How about the C N Tower?' Adam suggested.

'About seventeen times higher than that.'

'Hmm, you're talking Everest then?'

The Vixen News channel was still tuned in on the tv in the presently empty, insignificant motel room.

'Good evening, this is Carol Star, keeping you in touch with the latest news from around the globe. Reports are coming through of an incident at Quito municipal hospital in Ecuador. Late this afternoon, over forty people including Doctors, Nurses and patients collapsed or fainted. As yet we don't know the precise details. Let's go live, to Quito where Berny Carp takes up the story.'

'Yes, Carol. By the way, you're looking radiant today! Another strange event, this time in Ecuador. No one has, as yet, come up with a suitable explanation for this strange event.' said Berny.

'Could it have been a virus by any chance?' asked Carol.

'I don't think so. We've just received video footage from one of the hospital corridors, you'll never guess who's been captured on camera?'

'No, you're kidding!? Not our Madeline again?'

'Got it in one! The one and only. As you can see, she doesn't seem to be affected like the others,' said Berny.

'Lucky for her. Must be made of sterner stuff. Hmm, pink and white? Carnation pink I believe. I don't know… Barbie dollish don't you think? The green beam of light which looks as though it's coming out of her finger clashes slightly. Er, what exactly is that beam of light?' asked Carol.

'They think it's probably interference. If I didn't know better, I'd think it was some kind of laser beam,' jested Berny.

'Just listen to ourselves. We'll be believing in Martians next!' chuckled Carol.

'Perhaps that's it! Madeline is a Martian!' suggested Berny.

'Well, we certainly love Martians then,' said Carol.

'We certainly do,' said Berny.

'Thanks, Berny… Only Vixen News keeps you informed. Stay tuned for more important updates on Madeline's ever-changing wardrobe. Moving on to other news. Reports are coming in from the middle east of a cataclysmic event. Unlikely as it seems, the Dead Sea Depression has flooded. Over to our correspondent in Jericho… Hello Ed, what can you tell us about this freak event?'

'Hi Carol, carnation pink and white, eh? No doubt it will catch on… Yes, you're correct, vast swathes of land around the Dead Sea have indeed flooded. Scientists have apportioned blame on the recent unexplained explosion in Antarctica. There happens to be a fault line in the Earth's crust that runs all the way from Antarctica, through the Gulf of Aqaba, northwards up to the Dead Sea. They say the shock wave travelled up the fault line and opened up a rift between Aqaba and the south end of the Dead Sea,' explained Ed.

'And water flooded in I suppose,' said Carol.

'Exactly right, a tsunami of epic proportions. A wall of water, four hundred metres deep.'

'Many casualties?' asked Carol indifferently.

'Well, this is the strange bit: The area has, up until now, been mostly uninhabited. However, quite recently a brand-new town has emerged on

the shores of the Dead Sea with a population estimated at around twenty thousand. For some reason, the town is called COLEY.'

'But not anymore?' suggested Carol.

'That's true!' said Ed.

41. Passport control freak

Mount Everest was indeed seventeen times higher than the CN Tower. It was also on the other side of the world. However, this aside, there was a more immediate problem – Madeline didn't have her passport with her. There was a good reason for this. Up until now, she hadn't needed one. All her recent worldwide travel had been by a jet fighter that bypassed any officialdom. Regardless, they decided to try and get through passport control without this essential little paper book. The fact that most people now loved the feisty, possibly Martian, fashion icon, Madeline Bull who had saved the world many, many times, made not a scrap of difference. Passport control had to be firm. Rules were rules no matter who you were. At first, Madeline used her inbuilt skills, but her temporary enlarged boobs didn't work on the female member of staff. She tried the dippy approach, but she was too well known for that to work. In the end, she was driven to stamping the ground in temper, with her designer leather boots and causing a commotion. This attracted much attention, which conveniently (or inconveniently) included Vixen News:

'Breaking news, reports are coming in of our Madeline causing a stir at Quito airport. Berny is on the scene… Well, Berny, what's the latest?'

'Hi Carol, yes, apparently our beloved Madeline Bull tried to take a flight without a passport. She's claiming that someone stole it while she was in the queue.'

'Can't they turn a blind eye, after all, it is our Madeline?'

'You'd think so but rules are rules,' said Berny.

'I notice that she's still in the Barbie doll colours. They're definitely growing on me.'

'Yes, me too! Believe it or not, shops are selling out of carnation pink clothes.'

Yes, it was an embarrassing and frustrating time for Madeline. She had an arsenal of high-tech weaponry about her person but none could circumnavigate this problem. If she farted and everyone in passport control went to sleep, it wouldn't solve the problem.

Similarly, her laser would only irritate the officials. Adam tried to calm her down, but she was steadily becoming more and more irritated and upset.

'Please, I just want to go home!' she cried. 'It's *my* dream, why can't things happen the way *I* want them to.'

Adam continued with his attempt to console her but this was such a silly, silly, trivial thing standing in her way. She had recently been shot at, dissected, frozen to death, almost nuked in Antarctica and then frozen to death again at the top of Mount Chimborazo. However, these setbacks were minor compared to the problem she was now facing with a jobs-worth passport control officer.

'Isn't there anything I can do?' she pleaded.

'You will have to apply for a new passport Madam, which could take up to two months,' replied a youthful overweight uniformed girl with loops of shiny metal in various parts of her formerly pretty face.

It was about to become a no-win situation when her internal mobile phone rang…

'Madeline? It's Zol, Zol Pidem.'

'Yes, what do you want and how have you got my number?' said Madeline angrily. She was not in the mood to talk to one of Nuttall's accomplices.

'I can take you to Lukla if you want?' said Zol.

'Lukla? Where the hell's that?' asked Madeline.

'Mount Everest base camp.'

Another voice now joined in on her internal audio system.

'What the hell are you doing, Pidem?' raged Nuttall.

'For God's sake man, face reason. I've poured a billion dollars into your hair-brained scheme and all it's done is give us a bit more time. Just give in, she wants to go home,' said Zol.

'Have you kept your ear devices in? I warned you about the effects if you left them out. Come to your senses, if she gets to Everest and wakes up, we'll all die, everyone will die – cease to exist,' raged Nuttall.

'We won't die, we will remain in her memories,' said Zol calmly.

'What, a couple of minutes every now and then? I want more life than that!' screamed Nuttall.

'I'm taking her and that's that. She gave us life. We have to be grateful for

what we have had,' said Zol.

'Not good enough!! I'll stop you!' threatened Nuttall.

'Thank you, Mr Pidem. I'll accept your kind offer,' said a grateful Madeline.

Madeline's inner conversations were always a little disconcerting for Adam. One side of the conversation rarely gave the full picture of what was going on. When there were two inner voices inside her head and not particularly talking to the head they were in, all Adam had to go on were her limited facial expressions.

'What's going on?' asked Adam.

'Pidem is taking us!'

'Oh, we're trusting him now, are we?'

Madeline couldn't give a reply. She just shrugged her shoulders and gave him a look that basically meant: what choice do I have?

Zol Pidem was obscenely rich. He had funded the whole MI7 charade and paid for the base in Antarctica. Thanks to his money, the world had nearly been at war and every human on the planet was now permanently brainwashed. He had also funded the alterations to Madeline's body to make her a mobile ultrasound emitter and allegedly make her indestructible. As well as being eye-wateringly rich, he also owned an awful lot of gold. After the Fort Knox heist and subsequent illusory disappearance of the gold, the precious metal dramatically increased in value. This conveniently resulted in him having a net gain in his wealth despite all his outgoing.

Zol Pidem was fundamental to all Madeline's problems in this world of her dream and now, by way of redeeming himself, he was offering to help her. What could she think? What option did she have? Could she trust him?

No one could possibly say that saving the world from extinction was a bad thing. No one could blame Nuttall or Pidem for what they had done. It was purely self-preservation – a natural instinct. Madeline decided that sometimes you just have to trust people, no matter how rich they are.

42. Marmite on toast

For a small nine-seater Learjet, Quito, (Ecuador) to Lukla, (Nepal) was an epic journey. These places were almost the antipodes of each other. It would take four hops, resting and refuelling in between. The planned stops would be somewhere in Florida, Alaska, Russia and Mongolia. It would be hugely challenging for the pilot, having to complete at least twenty-four hours flying, over some of the remotest, most desolate parts of the Earth.

Madeline and Adam had to wait a day for the personal jet to arrive. Another day of shopping would have probably brought on a migraine to end all migraines so Adam persuaded her to do a spot of sightseeing around Quito instead. However, even doing that seemed to bring on a headache but then he realised it was the altitude. Of course, the altitude didn't affect Madeline as her essence (Poppy) never moved a single foot. True, Buxton's claim to fame was that it was the highest town in England but Quito was nearly nine times higher – the highest city in the world. Adam dearly hoped that the Learjet was pressurised as the aspirins were not working at all.

Zol Pidem's private jet landed smoothly on a little-used runway just outside Quito and then taxied almost right up to Madeline's and Adam's feet. He greeted them and welcomed them on board. They half expected him not to be there, passing the mammoth task on to one of his minions but he was true to his word, he was taking them.

A few hours ago, it was evident that no matter how many times she had saved the world or how famous she was, she still had to have a passport to prove who she was. To put it mildly, this pissed her off. However, having enough wealth to have your own private jet and a seventeenth-century baroque-style French chateaux, appeared to bypass all that bureaucratic authoritarian rigmarole. Of course, that was life. It was and always would be money that pulled strings, opened doors and enabled you to avoid confrontations with unfriendly officious jobsworths.

The first leg of the epic journey was a straightforward flight across to Florida. Once the plane had reached cruising height, Zol left Grayling at the controls and sat with Madeline and Adam.

‘All right now?’ asked Zol brightly.

‘Yeah, fine thanks… Unusual name?’ Madeline decided to befriend her reformed nemesis.

‘Zol? I suppose it is. I’m South African as you’ve probably guessed. My parents seemed to have a sense of humour, Zol is a hand-rolled cannabis cigarette.’ explained Zol.

‘How have you amassed your fortune, in cannabis cigarettes, perhaps?’ probed Madeline.

‘No, not exactly, pharmaceuticals. My company specialises in tablets for insomnia.’

‘Why have you changed sides?’ asked Adam.

‘Good question. As good as it is, I realise now that this world, this utopia, cannot go on forever. We either irritate or harmonise with our host – with you.’

‘You funded the attempts to keep me here?’ retorted Madeline.

‘Nuttall has a different approach to the situation. It all seemed a good idea at first but now I have my doubts,’ said Zol.

At that moment, Grayling, the co-pilot, called him on the intercom.

‘Excuse me, seems I’m needed.’

Madeline and Adam were left on their own in the luxurious cream leather seats, each with a glass of champagne.

‘Do you trust him?’ asked Adam.

‘I believe I do. Besides, what have I got to lose? He seems genuine enough.’

Adam finished off his champagne, reclined his seat and quickly fell asleep. Madeline had far too much on her mind to drift off. The evidence was there: Irrefutably, this world, this life, everything about it was of her fashioning. Apparently, it was all in her subconscious. It was her dream and it wasn’t real. But this was nonsense, surely? This world *was* real, as real as a cold shower, a rainy day, Marmite on toast, smiles and sadness. It was indistinguishable. She lived, was alive in this, her own world. And it was not as if she had any control over her ‘own world’. At times it was a cruel place, a sad and tormenting place.

Altogether a far direr prospect was that this wasn’t a dream world. Those white figures at the top of the mountain were angels beckoning her to her makers, to the pearly gates – to her death.

Then with a rush of reality, she homed in on everything about her. She was in a tank. Everything she saw, heard and felt was relayed from Madeline, a robot. Small television screens in front of her eyes and earphones were permanent fixtures. Numerous direct connections to her nerves gave her feeling. She had become accustomed to it, so much so that it was second nature but it wasn't real, it never could be. However, she looked at it, life wasn't real. She was either in a dream state or saw it artificially through the wonders of technology.

She became depressed with her thoughts. A saline tear formed. Zol returned from the cockpit forcing Madeline to snap out of her gloom. She surreptitiously wiped her tear away and drank the champagne – to hell with it.

'Landing in Ocala in a few minutes. We'll refuel and be off again in about an hour,' said Zol.

Adam was still asleep, oblivious to his girlfriend's state of mind. Zol noticed the tear but remained discrete. He smiled at her and returned to the cockpit.

The jet landed smoothly as to be expected, piloted by Zol. All but Grayling got out and stretched their legs. Strictly speaking, Madeline didn't have to do this. The last thing her legs wanted was stretching but Adam's did after his nap so she accompanied him.

A black fighter jet landed some distance away. It may have been a common sight on this particular airstrip but Zol and Adam watched on, uneasily, as a tanker raced over to refuel it. Madeline was more concerned about her short flimsy pink dress clashing with the paisley lining of her white leather jacket. This was easily remedied, she took the jacket off.

The next leg of the journey to Alaska also went without incident. Adam got bored and in desperation, read the in-flight literature which amounted to a *Home and Beauty* magazine – one, he had read already. Madeline caught up on social media. This was something she felt obliged to do. After all, she was now a bona fide fashion icon with a rapidly growing cult following, regarding her dress sense.

At the next refuelling stop, the temperature was noticeably cooler, especially for Adam. Florida was a comfortable 28 degrees. Fort Yukon airstrip in Alaska was a spine-chilling minus 10. Despite this, Madeline refused to put her jacket back on. After all, it was a lovely short pink dress with a daringly low neckline and three-quarter length butterfly patterned lace sleeves. It would be criminal to cover it up.

There was nowhere to go, it was just a matter of breathing in a lung full of icy fresh air and then getting back on board.

Strangely enough, a black jet fighter happened to land close by. It looked exactly like the one being refuelled at Ocala but surely that would have been too much of a coincidence.

43. A black menace

From now on they would be leaving the highly supervised American airspace behind and heading towards the desolate and inhospitable parts of Russia and beyond. Madeline peered through the small round window next to her. She could clearly see the Bearing Straits where America ended and Russia began. She could also make out a black jet fighter in the distance, rapidly heading towards them.

'Zol, I think we've got company,'

Zol peered out of his window and immediately headed toward the cockpit.

'Oh my God, it's firing at us!' screamed Adam in an unusually high-pitched voice.

The seatbelt sign came on and the plane aggressively dived without warning. Adam watched through his window as the missile passed rapidly over the top of the plane. Zol's voice came through on the intercom.

'Madeline, see if you can talk some sense into Nuttall. Can't see a way out of this.'

'Nuttall, Nuttall!' yelled Madeline to herself.

No reply came back. He was either out of range or ignoring her. Either way, this was bad. It wasn't the best place in the world to ditch a plane. The sea below was icy cold and if anyone did survive, it was very doubtful if there was anyone around to rescue them. The plane levelled up and then tried to gain some height. The jet engines screamed at full throttle. It was a very agile plane but was never designed for even the mildest form of combat. Adam watched as the black enemy jet circled around for a second attack. The first pass, they were lucky but they wouldn't get away with it again. The jet fighter rapidly approached. This time Zol couldn't outmanoeuvre it, he tried to climb out of the line of fire but it was futile, the missile was firmly on target. Moments later it hit, violently jolting the plane. The starboard engine instantly stopped screaming and dramatically exploded. Many bits of turbine spewed out of the rear nozzle along with flames and thick smoke. The Learjet was now running on one

engine.

‘He’s targeting the engines! We’re a sitting duck!’ yelled Zol through the intercom.

Madeline ran into the cockpit.

‘Zol, I need the door open!’

‘Can’t at this height. I have to depressurise!’

‘Do it!’ yelled Madeline.

Zol put the Learjet into a serious dive. Fortunately, Adam had his seatbelt on but Madeline hadn’t. Weightlessness was a strange and wasted experience for an android. She floated gently out of the cockpit, past Adam and towards the rear of the plane. Finally, the plane levelled up. The oxygen masks dropped, the interior suddenly went cold and misty and Madeline dropped heavily to the floor.

‘Okay, we’re depressurised, the door should open. He’s coming in again for another go!’ said Zol through the intercom.

The black fighter jet was now on its third pass and was approaching faster than the speed of a bullet. Madeline already had her laser weapon set on full. She threw the levers and yanked the door open on its hinges. Air rushed into the cabin along with thick smoke from the destroyed engine. She found a grab handle to hold on to with her left hand and carefully aimed her laser finger directly at the pilot’s eyes. Time slowed down. Milliseconds turned into seconds. She waited until the last possible moment, then fired. The green laser beam sliced a hole in the fuselage. A hit but just a superficial wound, the jet was still on course. She instantly fired again but missed entirely. In the meantime, another missile had been fired and was heading directly for the second engine. Moments later the missile hit, punching its way clean through part of the wing but there was no explosion. Zol saw it coming but with only one engine powering the plane, couldn’t do much about it other than sit there and grit his teeth. The Learjet was still intact but now unstable, Zol fought with the controls to keep it steady.

The fighter jet was now approaching for the fourth time. It had wounded its prey and was now in for the kill. The next missile would surely finish them off.

It was a gamble, her energy reserves were down to 8%. She engaged explosive motion, level 3 (She could now do this in an instant with the training she had with Vampire bats). Her left arm firmed up like the arm of a JCB digger, her grip locked like a blacksmith’s vice on the grab handle. Much better. She held perfectly still and fired her laser

for the third time. The whole of the cockpit lit up spectacularly.

That was the end of the jet fighter. It plummeted into the cold sea below leaving behind a column of black smoke.

‘Adam!’ screamed Madeline, ‘Nearly out of power, can’t hold on.’

Adam immediately saw her plight. She was dangling out of the doorway. He raced over to her and grabbed her right hand just as her left hand released its grip on the grab handle. The plane jolted and Madeline was outside the doorway – outside the plane. Adam wrapped his feet around the nearby seat frame and held on to her for dear life. She was heavy and his grip was slipping. Sweat poured from Adam despite the freezing air rushing into the cabin.

‘Sweetheart, you’ll have to let me go. I’ll be alright,’ Madeline shouted.

‘Not on your life, I’ve got you,’ Adam lied.

‘No, you haven’t!’

The writing was on the wall, his grip was failing. Madeline was going to fall, without a chute this time, thousands of feet into the cold, unforgiving sea below. Adam cried out, he tried to increase his grip but Madeline was too heavy, much heavier than a normal size zero, one, two or three, whatever, slip of a girl. Adam desperately needed explosive motion but he didn’t have it. He knew she almost certainly wouldn’t survive the fall, despite her invulnerability. Madeline could see Adam was in pain and recognised his fortitude. Adam sensed her slackening her grip – she was completely out of power. Even her backup batteries were spent. She was dead again.

There was little hope, within seconds Madeline would be falling towards the sea below at terminal velocity. The only way out now was a little help from her fairy godmother again.

She obliged.

The Learjet hit an air pocket and plummeted downwards. Suddenly Madeline was effectively weightless and floated upwards, Adam seized the moment and dragged her into the cabin. His whole arm was numb with pain but he found the strength to close the door and then flaked on the plush carpet.

Zol continued to fight with the controls to stabilise the plane, it was touch and go but Adam had complete faith in his piloting abilities. The main thing was that Madeline was now safe – dead yes, but that was a minor problem.

After a few minutes, Adam gained enough strength to lift Madeline

into her seat and then plugged her into a handy power socket. He then strapped himself into his own seat and fell asleep.

Being dead, she, (Poppy) was now completely disconnected from her android body and there was no way of knowing her fate. She assumed that she was now bobbing about in the cold Bering Sea. If that was the case, there was very little chance of survival, even for an android. Realistically, she knew Adam couldn't possibly have pulled her into the plane. Her last sight was seeing his hand slipping off her hand. That was the end then, only DVDs to look forward to. She was considering feeling sorry for the pilot she had just vaporised, but he asked for it. He shouldn't have fired missiles at a defenceless little baby Learjet.

44. A special android

Only one engine and a hole in the wing necessitated an emergency landing at a place called Kresta Bay on the far outskirts of northeast Russia. The landing was particularly hair-raising, not because of the seriously damaged plane but because of the state of the landing strip. It was unclear if it was made of tarmac, concrete or hard mud but it was definitely not designed for Learjets with pretty little alloy wheels.

Adam considered himself to be in a bad way: The depressurisation and breathing through an oxygen mask had brought on another headache. His arms, hands, legs and ankles were also aching, but on the whole, these things were quite trivial. If both engines had been hit, the Learjet would now be at the bottom of the icy Bearing Sea. All concerned would have either been drowned, frozen to death or been slowly eaten by sharks. That would have been a hell of a lot worse.

Unfortunately, with Madeline temporarily dead, Adam had no one to comfort him with his throbbing head. This used to be one of Madeline's top talents (inherited from Poppy, but he didn't know this). She could position her fingers in just the right spot on his temples and massage the throbbing pain away.

Zol emerged from the cockpit, he needed to see the hero of the day. It was now clear to him that Madeline was inordinately unique. Normal people can't shoot fighter jets out of the sky with their finger. Normal people don't hook themselves up to the onboard power supply to recharge. On the whole, normal people just eat far too much, get fat and then go on silly diets. Zol opened another bottle of champagne.

'She may be what she is but I love her more than life itself,' said Adam, holding his painful head.

'She's very special, she saved our lives,' said Zol.

'More than special, she gives us everything and I don't want to lose her,' said Adam with an emotional choke developing.

'You won't lose her, you'll always be there. Whenever the real Adam pisses her off, lets her down or falls short of being her perfect gentleman, you'll be there. You'll take his place. You are a very fortunate man.' said Zol quietly.

‘Doesn’t it bother you?’ asked Adam sombrely.

‘Yes, it does. I have so much money, so much power and it matters not a jot. I misguidedly tried to fund an extended life by keeping her here but now I know that was immoral.’

‘And unsuccessful,’ interrupted Adam.

‘Yes, quite! I realise now, that everything here in this world is a gift, a wonderful gift. We must accept matters and make the most of it while we have it.’

‘She’ll remember you too. with a name like that, how can she forget it!’ Adam smirked.

Zol smiled and patted Adam on the back.

‘I suppose I better go and check the state of the old girl,’ said Zol.

Moments later Madeline roused with a jolt.

‘Well, well! Apparently, I didn’t plunge into the icy sea and get eaten by sharks… Missed anything?’ she chirped.

It was awkward, and confusing for her. Undeniably, Madeline had just been dead and was now alive but her essence – Poppy, remained alive throughout, although fixed in a dream state at all times.

‘Not much. Had a right old pounder. Taken a couple of aspirins, almost gone now,’ groaned Adam.

45. An off-the-shoulder number

Egvekinot was like no other place Madeline or Adam had ever been before. Surely parts of the moon were more agreeable than here. It was ridiculously cold and apparently remained like this even in the summer. No trees, plants or flowers. It was far too cold for that. It was bleak, sparsely populated and bland but it had its own merits and a strange kind of beauty. Swaddled by Mountains in the background, older than time, bare, grey and spattered in snow, gave the place a unique perspective. The indigenous people, however, were hardened to all their discomforts. They would have it no other way and because of their isolation, knew little of Madeline Bull. This was refreshing for her.

It was certainly a peaceful and stress-free place and Madeline loved it. Even though the buildings bore a severe lack of any architectural skills, they were considerately painted in bold primary colours to brighten the place up. How nice!

The Learjet was grounded until parts could be flown over. The local garage could have perhaps supplied a fan belt or a spark plug but they were completely out of stock for Learjet wings and engines.

Zol, with all his money and charm, managed to seal a deal on an old Dakota style aeroplane. Clearly, it had awaited adoption at the side of the runway for many months if not years. Of course, the old metal bird had nothing like the range of the Learjet but hopefully, it would get them to some sort of civilisation.

It would take a day to get it ready and fuelled, this meant time spent in one of the remotest parts of the world. A complete absence of restaurants and hotels was going to make their stay a little awkward. As a last resort they could always sleep in the luxury reclining leather seats of the wounded Learjet and feed off canapes and champagne but that would be snubbing the town. Fortunately, the former owner of the old Dakota plane kindly offered to put the four of them up for the night.

Right now, there was another rather serious issue that had developed although not a matter of life and death this time. It concerned Madeline's appearance and consequently her dignity. Zol, Grayling

and Adam, all being typical heterosexual males, didn't class it as being a problem but the nice and considerate host's wife took Madeline under her wing and escorted her into her bedroom. The problem concerned the state of her short scanty pink dress. Scanty was now an inappropriate description, revealing was now far more accurate. The problem with most scanty materials is the inability to withstand rough treatment. The struggle in the doorway of the plane had plucked, tugged, torn and deformed the delicate dress into an entirely new off-the-shoulder, off the just about everything, look. If any fashion gurus happened to be about, this new design would have been on the shop shelves in a week but this was a place that fashion gurus probably didn't know existed.

After five minutes Madeline emerged wearing a multicoloured chunky home knit jumper. It was sufficiently oversized that it came down to her knees, covering a pair of thick black tights. Undeniably, she looked cute, cuddly and as always, ever so gorgeous. Thick black tights were something she had never considered wearing before because of covering her gorgeous legs and looking frumpy. Psychologically though, she felt warm and cosy in them.

The primitive conditions and basic food certainly didn't seem to bother one of the richest people in the world.

'Amazing what tasty food you can come up with from tins and packets,' said Zol insensitively.

Madeline didn't eat of course, but so as not to offend the hosts, she consumed a modest amount of goulash and red wine. Adam got drunk and Grayling rudely nodded off. Naturally, the language barrier was insurmountable. Any conversation almost immediately fizzled out. However, the awkward situation was rescued and resolved by a little Siberian entertainment. This amounted to an accordion played by Mr *Host* and an accompanying wailing voice from Mrs *Host*. They called the accordion a bayan and what she sang was a healing song to influence the weather. All very traditional but after singing several songs, they insisted, mainly by gestures, that their guests now reciprocated and provided some form of entertainment.

Zol revelled in the opportunity and surprised everyone by skilfully performing several card tricks followed by a few simple magic tricks. Adam was almost drunk so he insisted on singing a few George Michael songs completely off-key. Conveniently for Grayling, he was now snoring heavily, leaving Madeline's turn to entertain.

'Surely I don't have to sing for my supper?' she complained quietly.

'Come on, sing something,' insisted Adam.

‘I can’t sing to save my life.’

‘Well, dance or something! It’s expected here, they don’t have television,’ urged Zol.

‘I only have one talent, if you don’t count my weaponry and I don’t think they’re ready for that!’ she said in a loud whisper.

‘Just do it or they may throw us out,’ said Adam.

‘Okay, you asked for it! Me – go – get – changed,’ she said, gesturing to her hosts.

They smiled and nodded.

‘You won’t be smiling in a few minutes,’ she thought.

The nearest thing Madeline had to a leotard was her puce thermal suit. She quickly changed in the privacy of the cold dark hall and returned to the lounge with her jaw-dropping figure tightly covered in puce. They wanted some kind of entertainment, they were going to get it.

Inches in front of all of them she put on an acrobatic, gymnastics, contortion show they would never forget. Her bending and twisting went on for ten minutes or so. Not a sound was heard from the room except for the seams of her thermal suit tearing as she bent into the most unnatural positions. At one stage in the performance, Adam had to untangle her limbs. Finally, the performance came to an end. She bowed and left the room. The lounge remained silent for some time, apart from Grayling snoring. Zol and the male host were red-faced and the lady host was in a state of shock. She certainly wouldn’t be able to wail for a while. All said and done, it was a nice end to the evening. The hosts had well and truly been entertained, as was the tradition in these parts.

The next morning was even colder, bleaker, cloudier and windier. However, Madeline was an android and didn’t feel the cold, especially in her new colourful cosy jumper and thick black tights. She decided to have a stroll around before breakfast. Well, actually, no, she had breakfast whilst she was strolling around. It was an unnatural sight in these parts. A beautiful woman with the smoothest of skin and long blonde hair draped over her colourful thick knit jumper. Her long black covered legs with white leather boots on the ends looked like a couple of magician’s wands from a distance. There was no need to wear the customary animal skin coat with a furry hood, she didn’t need such protection despite the Siberian chill. It was inevitable that there would be shameful looks from the locals but she ignored the stares and had a pleasant, gentle amble about the place. What struck

her was the complete absence of children. It may have been too cold for ball games and riding bikes but surely, the occasional sight and sound of a child was only natural. Apart from the howling wind and scavenging gulls, it was an eerie place to be.

Then it dawned on her. She thought very carefully. She hadn't seen a single child anywhere since she became Madeline Bull. This was very odd indeed.

Of all the locations in this huge diverse world, this was surely a place on its own. Never before had she come across a location so isolated and so remote with people leading such an uncomplicated life. That's what she most liked about the place. Her ever-growing fame and reputation had their downsides, but here, they had never heard of Madeline Bull. In their eyes, she was just a hussy – an inadequately dressed floozy. They didn't know that she had saved the world several times at great personal sacrifice. They certainly didn't know she was an android packed with weapons and powered by a very advanced fuel cell system. They also had no idea that they were just figments of Madeline's dream.

However, when all was said and done, given half a chance, she would jump at simply being a hussy and a floozy rather than what she really was.

46. Flying blind

The old girl of a plane struggled to fire up. Eventually, both piston engines exploded into life making several parts of the fuselage visibly tremble. The range of a well-maintained Douglas DC 3 with a valid airworthiness certificate should be in excess of two thousand miles. However, this particular DC-3 didn't look as though it had seen a man with an oily rag for years. Consequently, Zol decided to limit the hops to no more than fifteen hundred miles.

This was his plan: The first hop to a place that sounded like Marzipan, then onto a place with an awful lot of letter A's in the name and finally arriving at Lukla airport, Kathmandu. This amounted to being many, many hours in the air in something that had been firmly planted on the ground for many, many years. What could possibly go wrong?

It was a big come down, like downgrading from a Range Rover sport to an old series one Landrover. On board the Learjet, you could whisper, sink in soft leather seats and balance cups on saucers – if you really preferred to drink tea instead of champagne. In this old flying bird, the seats were made from hard plastic with no padding. You had to shout to communicate and if you were unfortunate enough to be human and feel the cold, a thick, windproof coat was essential. Madeline kissed Adam and then switched off her senses, retreated inwardly and once again watched something on her entertainment system. It took all of Zol's and Grayling's skills to keep the plane in the air leaving Adam on his own. He did his best to nod off, meditate, read a book and listen to music on his smartphone but failed on all accounts. All he could do was look out of the filthy windows and shiver.

The plane skimmed the bland grey mountain tops and cast its ghostly shadow over the barren valleys. Occasionally small settlements appeared below. People ran out of their cone-shaped yarangas (tents) and waved. Adam was astounded that people still lived like this in the twenty-first century. Such a primitive, isolated existence, but they looked happy enough. In fact, far happier than most people walking down Oxford Street even when the sales are on. He had so many questions: Where did they get their food from? Did they read? Did the

children go to school? Did they have electricity? What did they do when they were poorly? Did they have toilet paper? And then he realised that he'd got used to the noise, the discomfort and the cold.

Slowly but surely the greyness of the mountains transformed into the greenery of trees and fields. Finally, there was normality: Proper roads, cars, trucks, supermarkets and blocks of flats. There were clear signs that it was no longer freezing and that there may even be a McDonald's or a KFC somewhere below.

Something like Marzipan airport runway rapidly approached. All in all, it was a good landing. Only two panels fell off and one tyre burst. The original plan was just to refuel and then take off but on reflection, a little bit of maintenance was essential.

Now let's be clear, this was no Gatwick. The control tower building looked condemned, the ground staff – there weren't any and the departure or arrival lounge was basically a burger van and a couple of wooden garden seats. The town was over five miles away so Adam had no choice but to have the Russian version of a cheeseburger and Madeline (Poppy) had a suck on her food pipe. The entire airport apparently only had one aircraft mechanic. As Zol and his butler barely knew enough to top up the windscreen washer bottle, they wisely let the mechanic check the plane over.

'I suppose I ought to be making the most of these final hours with you,' said Adam.

'This isn't the end, you'll be there when I wake up,' said Madeline reassuringly.

'I've told you, that's a different Adam!' he quietly grunted.

Madeline couldn't argue with him. She wanted to make love to him right now, not later, now, because, in every respect, he was right. But all there was, was grass and a few bushes – that would have to do. She took his hand and dragged him off the runway. Zol and Grayling glanced toward them up. They completely approved although naturally, they were deeply envious.

It was a sort of going away present.

If she failed and couldn't leave this world at least she had tried her best. Completely against his wishes, Adam knew she had to try. He had always known that he was just a figment, his world was just a figment, the thistles and wet grass on his bare back were a figment and Madeline's warm soft skin on his, was also a figment.

Within two hours they were back on the plane. The next stop was the place with lots of A's in its name. Zol hadn't taken any rest and

neither had Grayling. The engines eventually burst into action and dragged the old plane along the runway and eventually up into the air. The sun was setting, soon it would be nightfall. Flying at low altitudes over mountain ranges in the dark was never easy in the best of flying machines and this was perhaps the worst of flying machines. Within an hour it was pitch dark. The moon was hiding and the terrain beneath them was typically barren and void of any street lights or vantage points. They would have to fly by instruments. The ground-proximity-warning system (GPWS) and the altimeter were their eyes. The easiest way to fly at night would have been to fly very high, thereby avoiding hitting anything but this plane wasn't pressurised. This meant that it had to be flown as low as possible to prevent, amongst other things, Adam from getting a headache again. As low as possible actually meant quite high, owing to the height of the mountain ranges they were flying over. Zol's and Grayling's flying skills were pushed to the limit. Mile after mile, their eyes were glued to the instruments. With complete darkness through the cockpit windows, they were flying blind, but reassuringly, the altimeter continued to read 6000 metres and the GPWS was silent. Everyone but Madeline was beginning to suffer from oxygen deprivation and the cold.

For over an hour they flew without incident and then suddenly a loud scraping noise came from the underside of the plane. Instinctively, Zol pulled back the stick. The engines roared louder and the plane vibrated even more. He levelled out at 6200 meters and turned on the feeble plane lights – they didn't work. He tapped the GPWS, it was clearly on but he noticed that the fault light was dimly glowing.

'Shit, I think we really are flying blind,' yelled Zol.

Just at that moment, Madeline entered the cockpit.

'Just been talking to Nuttall. He asked me how you're getting on, flying in the dark… Oh my God!' she screamed.

Madeline knew nothing about flying a plane except for what she'd seen in disaster movies. She instinctively yanked the stick back as far as it would go. Once again, the engines roared and the plane shook.

'You can see?' yelled Zol.

'Yes, fortunately, I've got zero lux vision. Nearly went into the side of a mountain or rock or something.'

'We have to go down, too high!' gasped Zol.

'I can't see anything in the way now,' said Madeline.

Zol gently pushed the stick forward and reduced the altitude.

‘You’ll have to be our eyes. Grayling, let Madeline sit there… Grayling!’ yelled Zol.

Yelling was no good, the co-pilot had passed out, most likely from oxygen deprivation.

Madeline selected level 2 explosive motion and carried Grayling into the back.

Of all the things Zol had seen Madeline do, this was by far the most impressive, even more than last night’s entertainment. A twenty-stone man effortlessly picked up and carried by a slither of a woman who didn’t even bother to work out.

‘See what you can do with him, sweetheart. I’m needed up front,’ said Madeline.

She plonked Grayling in a seat next to Adam and returned to the cockpit. It was a relatively easy job. All she had to do was say up, up! or UP!! and Zol pulled the stick back accordingly.

‘Bloody aircraft mechanic! Obviously one of Nuttall’s men. He must have tampered with the lights and the GPWS,’ raged Zol.

‘The what?’

‘Ground proximity warning system.’

‘That’s what I am now, is it?’

‘Yes, a damn cute one at that!’

‘Zol! You’ll have me blushing,’ said Madeline disingenuously.

Now that Zol had the use of Madeline’s see-in-the-dark eyes, the flight was pretty much uneventful. They sat there for many a while in silence and then Madeline asked an overdue question.

‘You and Nuttall, how did you meet?’

‘It’s your dream, don’t you know?

‘If I knew, I wouldn’t be asking.’

‘It was at Cambridge.’

‘That’s a coincidence, that’s where Professor…’

‘Braugenhau went,’ Zol interrupted. ‘We were all there together.’

‘She showed me a photo. Now then, where is it?’

Madeline accessed the photo from her gallery file and examined it – all within her head.

‘Yes, I can see the resemblance now. You and… no, is that Nuttall?’

Zol continued to find it hard to accept that she wasn't human. If she just had a few android traits like a 'robot voice' or jerky movements or cold staring eyes but she didn't. She was truly perfect in every detail. For an android, a photographic memory came as standard.

'We had hair then, lots of it. We were good friends. We even did the boat race together. You probably remember it, the one where the Cox fell in the Thames.' Zol broadly smiled. 'Can't blame him for trying to save a world from extinction. Knowing Nuttall, he's probably getting his own back for what we called him.'

'What, nutty?'

'That would have been far too obvious, he was always acting the clown, that's partly why the Cox fell overboard. No, we called him Coco.'

'**Coco Nuttall,**' said Madeline disconcertingly.

For some unexplainable reason, the name sent shivers down both her spines.

'At least now I know how to irritate him. Anyway, thanks for all you've done for me. I know I'm weirdly thanking a figment of my imagination but you are real to me here.'

'I am real! Don't, for one second, belittle my life here. It goes against every fibre in my body helping you to leave this world. I just know it is the right and proper thing to do,' said Zol testily.

'Well, I appreciate it anyway. You know I'm torn apart with all this, but it's tough love, I simply have to get back.'

That's all Madeline could say. She hadn't forgotten that not so long ago, Zol was prepared to do anything it took for Madeline to stay. This involved all manner of ruthlessness and violence but fortunately for Madeline, he had had a change of heart. She now recognised him as a man with good virtues. Whether Nuttall also had the same qualities, was debatable, especially after the black fighter jet incident and sabotaging the plane.

Madeline proved very useful over the next six hours. It wasn't flying by instruments but flying by Madeline. Finally, the sky began to offer a glimmer of light, dawn was breaking. Madeline's unique gift was no longer required. Grayling returned to his rightful place and Madeline returned to Adam. He had finally overcome the noise, lack of oxygen, the discomfort and fallen asleep. Madeline cuddled into him, resting her head on his shoulder, she too, fell asleep.

Finally, the runway lights came into view and the seatbelt signs came

on – one of the few things that worked. Adam and Madeline woke up with a start, together.

‘Bloody thief that Grayling, he’s stolen twenty quid off me!’ complained Adam.

‘He has, has he. Don’t worry sweetheart, I’ll get it back off him,’ assured Madeline.

‘I’m sure he was hiding cards up his sleeve.’

‘Or perhaps I won’t,’ said Madeline.

It has to be said that it would have been a perfect landing if the plane’s brakes had worked. It didn’t help coming in a little steeply but with only half the gauges working, it was a miracle that Zol managed to get the plane down at all. The upshot was that the plane dangerously overshot the runway. Landing without permission was another cause for concern. The excuse was that the radio didn’t work, which was perfectly true.

As it was an international airport, there was an abundance of ground staff, security staff and places where they could lock people up. Madeline has lost count of how many times she’d been in this situation, locked in a small holding room. Of course, with Madeline’s assets, getting out would be easy, but the security staff carried guns and three out of the four of them were not bulletproof.

Each was interrogated individually: Adam was a passenger with a valid passport so they let him go. Grayling was Zol’s butler, he was just doing the job he was paid to do so they let him go. It was Zol’s plane, he had the papers, he had landed recklessly and bypassed all airport protocols but he had lots and lots of money. After lengthy negotiations, they let him go too. Madeline was merely a passenger too, just like Adam but she had no passport so they didn’t let her go. Naturally, it was highly frustrating. She didn’t want to use her fart gas or go on a stunning spree with her laser finger but time was ticking by. Mount Everest was still nearly two thousand miles away. Being locked up in a little grey room was not exactly where she wanted to be. She called Adam on her internal mobile phone for a little chat.

‘Hi sweetie pie, I’m thinking about breaking out.’

‘Naturally, but hang on a few minutes, Zol’s in the process of chartering a commuter aircraft. I’ll give you a call when we’re on the runway.’

‘Remember, I’m in high heels, I can’t run in them.’

‘Well, take them off then! Oh, and try and be gentle with the staff.’

‘Aren’t I always?’

47. Breaking the speed limit

Commuter aircraft are sometimes classed as air taxis but there is a crucial difference, you can't just hail one down, get in and set off. It took nearly two hours to do all the checks on the plane and then another hour for Adam, Zol and Grayling to pass through border control. Then it took a further hour before there was an available slot for them to take off. Four hours later Adam rang Madeline.

'When you're ready, babe, we're taxiing out.'

'Finally! Thought you'd forgotten about me. Okay, see you in a minute. Keep your mobile on.'

'Explosive motion setting 3 should be adequate,' she thought. With one hefty push, the door hinges snapped, the door burst open and she was out of the building long before any bullets whizzed past her. The size of this particular airport was deceptive – nearly a quarter of a mile to the runway. She took off her high heels and within seconds she was striding across the lengthy airport taxiway at a comfortable 20 MPH. Eventually, the runway came in sight. The commuter plane was ahead of her, about to take off. After two minutes she was almost alongside but then the plane began to accelerate.

'Hang on, I'm not there yet!' Madeline screamed.

'We're committed, run faster!' said Adam in her head.

Madeline put her explosive motion on the highest setting.

'Holy shiiiit!' she screamed.

Her strides became immense, touching the ground only every fifteen metres or so. She was moving so fast that she was in danger of becoming airborne herself. Her feet were taking the bulk of the rough treatment. Her thick black tights were now completely worn away and riding up her legs. Her USB socket in her big toe was totally wrecked and the skin on the bottom of her feet was getting scratched to hell. 70 MPH was her maximum speed, just enough to line up with the open door of the plane and jump in. She landed violently inside, in a heap.

'Wow, that was fun!' she said.

Within moments, the commuter plane was in the air and steadily ascending. The airport with lots of A's in its name was quickly disappearing into the distance.

The TV in the insignificant motel room was still turned on and tuned into the Vixen News channel. It really was time someone visited the vacant room and turned it off.

'Let's go over to Berny for the very latest international news,' said Carol Star in the studio.

'Morning Carol. Not a lot going on for a change. Since the amnesty for world peace following the 'rest of the world hating America' debacle, all is becoming relatively quiet on the news front,' said Berny.

'Yes, very strange all that. Never really had a proper explanation as to why it happened.'

'Don't think we ever will. Anyway, good came out of bad. For the first time in history, everyone is at peace. The downside is that I'm running out of things to report. There is a video going viral on the internet that the viewers may be interested in…'

'Let's have a look!'

The poor-quality video appeared to show a young woman, dressed in a colourful jumper and black tights, running at an incredible speed, alongside an aircraft taking off. The video finally showed the woman jumping in through the open door in the fuselage.

'That's incredible!' said Carol. *'Obviously a fake but very well done.'*

'I agree but have a closer look, who does she remind you of?' asked Berny.

'Oh my God! It's… no, surely not?' said Carol.

'Someone's obviously having a laugh at Madeline's expense,' said Berny.

'Well, it can't be Madeline. Come on now, a baggy granny jumper and black tights? Not clothes Madeline would be seen dead in,' Carol clarified.

'Notice you've got quite a fetching carnation pink outfit on today,' said Berny.

'Why, thank you, Berny. I think the colour suits me, don't you?' said Carol blatantly flirting on air.

That was a part of the plan and it had worked. The ultrasound signal had, at the time, brought out the worst in people. Hatred towards the Americans was so intense that a world war almost began. But that was

never the intention. The ones responsible, including Nuthall and Pidem, knew that the ultrasound brainwashing would have a rebound effect. When the ultrasound stopped, the hate turned into love. The emitters at the South Pole were scheduled to be turned off long before the invasion fleet reached American shores but Madeline got there first with her explosives. No matter, within moments of the ultrasound stopping, the world began to love each other, especially the North Americans. All wars immediately ended. All hate gave way for kindness, greed gave way for generosity, condemnation gave way for forgiveness and cruelty gave way for compassion.

Madeline's world was completely at peace.

48. Power sockets

Even though Madeline was essentially an android, she lay on the floor in a drained heap for some time while she caught her breath. No one came to her assistance because rules are rules – the seatbelt lights were still on. Eventually, she examined her feet, they had survived reasonably well although the USB socket in her big toe would never see the likes of a dongle or flash drive again. No matter, she slid the remains of her thousand denier granny tights off her silky-smooth legs and used them as a belt around her tiny waist turning her oversized jumper into a fashion statement outfit. She put her white high-heeled boots back on, ran her fingers through her hair and after a quick wipe down with a wet wipe and she was ravishingly gorgeous again. She sat down next to Adam.

'Hi beautiful, decided to join me then?' said Adam cheerfully.

Madeline was just about to give him a loving hug when she suddenly realised her explosive-motion was still set on full. It didn't bear thinking about what would have happened, but she did. The 'hug' would have crushed his ribcage, mulched all his internal organs and certainly killed him.

'God, that was too close. I hate, hate, hate being different,' she complained.

'Being different is what makes you special.'

'Exactly, I don't want to be special anymore.'

'Don't worry sweetheart, won't be long now.'

All being well, it would take five hours to get to Lukla airport. Once again, they were back to reasonable luxury with nice soft seats and quiet enough to communicate without yelling at each other.

'You can't come with me, you know,' said Madeline softly.

'I'm coming with you as far as Everest base camp, you try and stop me!' said Adam.

'We'll need a tent – two-berth,' smiled Madeline.

'Naturally,' said Adam.

‘Actually, there’s a problem, quite a significant one. Unless there happens to be a couple of power sockets on the way, it’s very doubtful that my power reserves will get me as far as base camp, let alone the rest of the way to the top.’

‘I know, worked that out myself. Hang on a second,’ said Adam as he left his seat.

He returned from the cockpit with a smile.

‘Zol’s going to sort something out.’

‘He’s a saint. I suppose I better be fully charged before I leave the plane.’

‘Err, shall we go in the back, and sort that out now?’ suggested Adam.

‘And while we’re at it, we can look for a power socket?’

49. The Reunion

Madeline never overlooked the fact that Nuttall could listen in whenever he wished to – even when they were making love or engaged in small talk. Perhaps the invasion of privacy was something she had to tolerate but never a concept she could get used to. He had been suspiciously quiet in her head for some time now. This was a relief to some extent but disconcerting all the same.

Thanks to Zol's piloting skills, he managed to land the plane on the ridiculously short and perilous runway at Lukla airport. Strictly speaking, the plane was far too large for such a small single airstrip, gouged into the rocky mountainside. No two ways about it, he shouldn't have landed, but he had done and that was that.

Yes, they managed to find a power socket, Madeline was now fully charged and Adam was fully discharged. It may well have been their last time.

Finally, her destination was in sight. After many hours, she was almost on the other side of the world with another mountain beckoning her. They disembarked to a waiting helicopter with engine running. Finally, Zol and Grayling could rest and recover from their epic journey. This was the end of the line for both of them, mainly because neither of them could fly a helicopter. Madeline hugged Zol and shook Grayling's enormous hand. They made a point of saying farewell and not goodbye.

Madeline and Adam boarded the small helicopter for the relatively short flight to Everest base camp.

The pilot appeared to be in a hurry, raising the helicopter rapidly from the small runway. The entire proportions of the commuter aircraft could now be seen hogging the small purpose-built airport. The reality of the situation was that the airstrip was far too short for such a large aircraft to take off. It would be there for a while if not forever. The helicopter was soon dashing across the rocky appendages and encrusted snow of the Himalayas. It was a thrilling flight with views to die for, but Madeline never noticed. Many things were bothering her now. She was on a journey to another world but she was about to end the lease on the one she was in now. The pilot

seemed to be in a hurry.

‘Heh, Mr Pilot, what’s the rush?’ asked Madeline.

The pilot ignored her.

‘I said…’ Madeline was about to repeat herself.

The pilot slowly turned to them and removed his overly large sunglasses. He was familiar, too familiar.

‘So near but so far. All credit to Zol for getting you this far,’ said Nuttall.

Madeline was speechless and mortified. Seeing her number one nemesis was like a heavy blow to her chest.

‘Any last request?’ said Nuttall with a big grin across his face.

‘Please, take me to Everest base camp?’ asked Madeline doubtfully.

‘Okay, I suppose so,’ said Nuttall cockily.

‘Pardon, you will?’

‘No choice, things have changed. Let’s say, there’s been a development,’ said Nuttall poignantly.

‘What kind of development?’ she asked curiously.

‘We’ve noticed a serious anomaly in our world and a development in yours, that’s all I’m saying.’

Nuttall said no more, he had already said too much. Forty minutes later Nuttall manoeuvred the stick and slowly descended the helicopter onto the loose shale and ice of Everest base camp. Ideally, he could have flown Madeline right to the top, but the altitude was too high for the helicopter. She would have to do the last bit on her own.

That was always the way it had to be.

The climate at base camp was certainly a shock to the system – specifically Adam’s system. It was much colder than Lukla and the severe lack of air gave Adam another pounding headache. No matter, he had to see Madeline off on her final journey. He wasn’t at all dressed for the climate and neither was Madeline but she didn’t particularly feel the cold. Her new cosy woolly outfit and white high-heeled leather boots would do just fine.

Whilst she was giving Adam a long farewell hug and kiss, the array of tents behind her unzipped their flaps and all the occupants spilt out. She sensed the presence of many people – she slowly turned around.

To her bewilderment, dozens of people were standing there, quietly smiling and waving. Almost every single person she had met in this world of hers: Zol, Gemma Bream, Coley, Grayling, Alfonsino, Professor Braugenhau, The President, The Vice President, The defence secretary, the team from Vixen News, Bert and many more. A man emerged from the crowd, he walked over to Madeline and removed his furry hood and sunglasses.

‘Bops!! What are you doing here?’

‘Sending you off, of course!’

They hugged each other, she thanked him for everything, both wept a little and then he walked back into the crowd. Nuttall approached and gave her an unexpected hug, wished her luck and then climbed back into the helicopter. It was all up to her now. For many reasons she had to stay focused and professional but she struggled to control her emotions. She dearly wanted to sob her heart out but a few tears down her perfect cheeks would have to do for now. Adam found himself in a similar state but he couldn’t possibly cry in front of all these people around him. He knew he would never see her again and his heart was now breaking.

But the pain would soon be over as would this world of his.

50. Putting on a new face

Madeline set off slowly at first but soon settled into a steady pace. She decided not to engage explosive-motion until the base camp was completely out of sight. Every so often she turned around and waved, they were all still there. Adam was shivering uncontrollably but never took his eyes off her, and then suddenly, she turned a corner and they were all gone. She was on her own, completely ill-equipped to climb the tallest mountain in the world, but she was an android with superpowers. Now it was time to select explosive-motion level 3. Her power reserves were at maximum – she began to run. It was going to be the fastest ascent ever. Her white high-heeled boots landed deeply in the soft snow but this didn't deter her pace. The snow gave way to ice and rocks but still, her pace increased. It wasn't long before the inevitable happened – one of her heels snapped.

She sat for a while, removed both her boots and took a long look at the incredible view. She was above the clouds, above everything. She could see for miles in every direction. She gazed in awe at the snow-capped mountains she had recently flown over. It may all have been firmly fixed in her mind but everything about this world was wonderful and beautiful.

Impractically dressed and without footwear she continued to climb. The ascent was getting harder now, more up than along. The climb had become a proper mountaineering event. Her fingers pulled her, her feet pushed her until finally, she reached a ridge with steep slopes on either side. No longer could she run as every footstep now had to be carefully planned. She thought of going down on all fours and galloping along like a horse but decided against it. Her baggy jumper had absorbed so much melted snow and ice that it had become wet and heavy, certainly not warm and cosy anymore. She discarded it. Now she was completely naked and icy cold but remained a sex goddess in every respect. Again, she had forgotten to put any underwear on. She really was incorrigible.

With still two miles from the summit, she checked her energy reserves, 15%, she wasn't going to make it. Most of her power was being used to maintain her core temperature. There was nothing else for it, she turned her heating circuits off. She had survived the south

pole with no adverse effects so surely, she would cope with the relatively mild temperature of minus 30 degrees. This didn't mean to say she could take her time. The low temperature would almost certainly affect the functioning of her artificial body. She had to get to the summit as quickly as possible.

Unlike a typical day when it can get quite crowded with mountaineers, in Madeline's world, the path was deserted. At least this helped spare her dignity to the end.

Now only one mile to go and 10% energy reserves remaining, she had a good feeling.

'Yes, yes, yes, I'm going to make it,' she cheered.

The clear sky above her was beginning to alter, turning from deep blue to brilliant white. She could feel the other world beckoning her just like it was in Ecuador. She could now see the summit clearly but her body was becoming sluggish. The low temperature was affecting her soft pneumatic muscles. It was an effort to move, but she had come much too far to give up now. Two hundred yards to go and every step was like walking through thick porridge, but it was in the bag.

She decided, for no apparent reason, that she should be as presentable as possible before she transcended. With the beautiful body she was fashioned with, she couldn't be more presentable than being naked. However, she did have a feature that she hadn't used in this world. There hadn't been any particular call for it but she always had the facility to change her facial appearance. She examined her menu as best as she could with her frozen finger and thumb. Many options were available: *Ugly, old, simple, face 1, face 2, face 3 and… Poppy*! She selected *'Poppy'*. Instantly her face began to contort, expand and contract until she looked exactly like her real self. Oddly the process didn't stop there, her tiny waist expanded out a few inches, her thighs slightly bulged and small flabby wings appeared under her arms. Not only did her face now look exactly like Poppy's, her body apparently looked exactly like Poppy's too.

'Christ, I've put on a few pounds!' she groaned.

Twenty yards to go, ten yards to go, she could see the shapes of several people. They were all white within an even whiter background. The light was dazzling but drawing her.

And then she was standing at the summit.

The white light engulfed her, warmed her, lifted her and swaddled her. The mountain disappeared beneath her bare feet, beneath her

naked body. The world she had fashioned and become to love, dissolved quickly away and a room formed around her.

She was lying on a bed, definitely a bed, and people were standing over her. The people were all smiling and one particular person had tears running down his cheeks.

It was another Adam – the real Adam.

51. Vital signs OK

‘Welcome to our world!’ said someone – probably a doctor.

She was still dazzled but her eyes were slowly adjusting.

‘Vital signs okay?’ said someone else – probably also a doctor.

‘Yes, steady and climbing,’ said probably a nurse this time.

Then suddenly a new, wonderful world came into view. Yes, she was in a bed in a hospital room, Ward 8, no doubt. She eased herself up. Through the window, she could see trees and fields and clouds and birds. Inside she could see many happy white-coated people and then she saw Adam. Instantly she knew that this wasn’t a dream. It was as real as it gets. Adam looked older and greyer, he broadly smiled at her. She loved him deeply with every fibre of her being. The Adam she’d left at base camp was purely a figment of her imagination, but it would take a while to become entirely dismissive of her fantasy lover. He had been her one and only Adam for such a long time. In every sense, he was her knight in shining armour.

‘Hello, sleepyhead, how are we feeling?’ asked Adam, softly.

‘A little weird. What happened?’

‘You had a relapse.’

‘You’ve grown a beard, don’t like it, how long?’

‘Two months, the beard, four months in a coma.’

‘Four months!! Is it going to happen again?’

‘They don’t think so. There was a build-up of toxins in your brain, they’ve cleared now,’ explained Adam.

‘Twenty-seven toxins by any chance?’ asked Poppy.

‘Probably, anyway, I’ll ask you again and this time I want you to concentrate… How are *we* feeling?’

‘Hungry?’

‘Yes, anything else?’

‘A bit of heartburn?’

‘Yes…’

‘Oh my God! Oh my God! OH MY GOD!!

Madeline lifted the bed cover and looked at her stomach. She wasn’t fat at all. Her bulging stomach was a baby bump. She felt her baby, it kicked her hand

‘Started kicking this morning,’ said Adam proudly.

‘But, but, I’m pregnant? How… but… when? You?’

‘You’re four months preggers. I assume it was something to do with what happened in the grass next to that trickling stream, remember?’

‘I’m pregnant! I’m going to have a baby!’ Poppy screamed with delight.

‘Yes, that’s what usually happens.’

‘Adam Manning, I love you… with all my heart.’

‘Poppy Cock… We better get that name changed.’

She was in no fit state to think about her recent experiences, she was far too overwhelmed, but that’s what Nuttall meant by developments. That’s why he could no longer justify keeping her locked in her dream state and why he had to sacrifice his life and the only world he knew. Madeline had briefly noticed an anomaly and instantly disregarded it: She couldn’t remember seeing any children. It was a sign.

Another four months had passed without Adam having his girlfriend’s company. He had been at her bedside for several hours, every single day since she regressed and fell back into a coma. Her coma returned because of the build-up of toxins in her brain. The first step of her treatment was to remove these toxins. In Madeline’s subconscious world this was represented by removing twenty-seven whole life prisoners. This she did effectively without a lot of effort on her part.

Her strength was rapidly returning; she sat up in bed. Reality flooded in and once again bombarded her senses. The thing about dreams is that when you’re in them you don’t know you’re in them. Normally, you have no idea that it isn’t a reality until you wake up and then you know. Her dream didn’t follow these guidelines and was far from normal.

She examined her hands. There was a complete absence of lasers, tasers and hypodermic needles in any parts of her fingers. She rubbed her thumb and forefinger together but nothing happened, no menu appeared in her sight. She was back to being human and pregnant. Adam took her hand, her human, perfectly normal, soft, warm hand

and squeezed it. They had so much to talk about so they said nothing. She would be weak for some time and now that she was pregnant, special care was essential. The perfect person to advise her on rehabilitation entered the ward.

'Ah! My most favourite patient, you decided to join us at long last,' said Doctor Barton.

Poppy pulled him towards her and gave him a hug.

'Thank you for everything,' she said.

'You don't know what I've done yet,' said the Doctor.

'You never left my side, I know that.'

'This young man is the one who deserves all the credit. He's the one who's never left your side,' said Barton.

'I hope you've looked after my precious bump while I've been away,' she taunted.'

'When they found out that you were pregnant, they got in an American nutritionist. She put you on a special diet, mainly fish and coconut oil,' said Adam.

'You know I hate coconut, it makes me heave. I'm not particularly fond of fish either!' Poppy complained.

Suddenly she realised that the consequences of eating fish and drinking coconut oil profoundly influenced her dream.

'Coconut oil… Coco Nuttall!' Poppy laughed.

'Don't tell me, someone in your dream by any chance?' suggested Adam.

'Nuttall, he was my nemesis, pestered me all through my dream, turned okay in the end though.'

Now she knew why there was such hatred focused on the Americans. It was an American nutritionist who had made her consume coconut oil and fish. She hated coconut and she wasn't particularly sweet on fish either. From the beginning, it was Nuttall controlling her every move. Later she found out that Nuttall's nickname was Coco – Coconut oil. Many of the people in her dream had fishy surnames: Coley, Bream, Star, Alfonsino and Grayling. Everything was rapidly falling into plaice.

Just like before, when she was previously in a comatose state, occasionally she would be aware of certain happenings in the real world. These happenings were latched onto and absorbed, measurably

affecting her inner consciousness. Poppy succinctly summed all this up in as fewer words as possible:

‘One hell of a dream – again!’

‘No doubt you’re going to tell me all about it?’ said Adam.

‘What made me finally break out of my coma then? I know I had to climb up a mountain to get to you.’

‘We tried a radical new technique, using a sleeping drug,’ said Doctor Barton.

‘Okay, you’re not making sense but I’m listening.’

‘A drug called Zolpidem.’ said Barton.

‘Get away, no! Zol Pidem, he got me to Everest.’

‘Who is Everest?’ asked Adam now getting confused.

‘No, Mount Everest, Zol Pidem, Zol, he flew me around the world. He was a brilliant pilot.’

‘If I can just get a word in edgewise,’ interrupted Barton, ‘Zolpidem is a drug usually used to treat insomnia but has been found to sometimes be effective for patients in a comatose state.’

‘Well, he, it, got me back,’ said Poppy firmly.

This time Poppy had successfully figured out the principal parts of her elaborately fabricated subconscious world, for herself. Last time Adam had to explain it all to her but this time it was merely down to toxins, fish, coconut oil, and a drug for insomnia. There was one element of her dream that hadn’t been cleared up but was about to be.

‘That noise, isn’t it bothering you?’ complained Poppy.

‘What noise might that be?’ asked Adam.

‘That high-pitched whistle. It’s going right through me,’ said Poppy.

There was only one thing close by that could be making that kind of sound: Doctor Barton turned off the life support monitor, it was completely unnecessary now.

‘Is that better?’ asked Barton.

‘Thank god for that.’

The high-pitched whistle coming from the monitor, which Madeline had interpreted as ultrasound, had profoundly influenced her dream. Barton and Adam couldn’t hear the whistle because its frequency was beyond their hearing range but Poppy could, she was younger. For four months Poppy had suffered in silence and tolerated an annoying

high-pitched sound emanating from a heart monitor within a few feet of her.

52. Return to Digg

This time, convalescence wouldn't be rushed. Poppy was kept in hospital for a further week. During this time, many faces fitted into place. Doctors, nurses, specialists, and physiotherapists, all had faces that had at some time, appeared in her long dream. Of course, their names were different – mainly named after varieties of fish. Some of the nurses, cleaners and tea ladies were the whole life prisoners who all had a fateful end. It would have been inappropriate to mention this to them, they were all kind, friendly people. Adam brought Poppy up to speed with all the important news in the last four months. Top of the list was his football team, Bristol City FC (whose kit happened to be mostly *red*) thrashing Premier league Chelsea, 5 – 2. Of course, Poppy knew all about it, although she was sure the score was higher than that, more like 210 – 2.

Finally, Poppy walked out into the brilliant sunshine and crisp fresh air. She was no longer an android, she no longer had her superpowers and she no longer had a legacy. She was human, free and expecting. Adam held her tightly and protectively even though it was unnecessary. He steadied her over kerbs, down the steps and into his car. Poppy certainly wasn't going to complain, how could she? Everything about her fiancé was perfect, even his beard was now growing on her as it had on him. At last, she was going to marry him. The makings of a perfect family were imminent. This was more serendipitous than even a walk along a babbling brook or tea and scones. She was entirely happy again. Life was so wonderful.

There were a few places she wanted to visit, the first place was Buxton. She had never been there before but no matter, that's where she wanted to get married and this they did. Not in a church but in the indoor gardens of the Pavilion. Adam never questioned her reasoning even though Buxton was well over a hundred miles up north. Even though it was July and a glorious summer's day, there was a distinct nip in the air. Several guests – their best friends and close relations, squeezed in amongst the plants and around the fish pond. Poppy wore a most beautiful carnation pink wedding dress complemented with white leather boots and a short white leather jacket. For reasons only known to herself, it was her wish to be dressed like this and everyone genuinely agreed that she looked

stunning. Poppy's mother stood with Poppy and Adam's father stood with him. The Vicar did his part, Adam said a few important words and so did Poppy. They were then pronounced husband and wife and kissed. This was all they ever wanted – nothing more.

Poppy was well known, but she had recently learnt that fame is rarely a good thing. A wedding down south would have attracted far too much attention: hundreds of television associates, reporters and inevitably the press. Adam would have felt pushed out and the wedding would have been memorably shallow. In Buxton, the marriage was perfect, complete, meaningful and everlasting.

The 'do' afterwards was in a quiet pub across the road. A speech or two was made, the cake was cut and that was that. Mr and Mrs Manning left in the beloved Volvo. It was now just as much Poppy's as Adam's. Just one of the many benefits of marriage.

Their honeymoon was to be another surprise for Adam. She wished it to be spent in a place she had only ever been to in a recent dream. In her mind, it was paradise – bleak, remote and wild, but nevertheless, paradise. The sat-nav was set, and Adam drove, following its instructions to the letter. They didn't say a lot during the journey. Finally being together, properly together was enough. The radio was still on the same station, just like it was before but then Poppy was on her own and she was Madeline. She wondered, hoped, imagined that her lovely Professor friend really did live there but in reality, she knew this couldn't be. She was a figment of her dream and lived there only in her dream. Maybe the place wouldn't be like she imagined, after all, in reality, she had never been there before.

In contrast, the sky was clear and blue this time. The puddles had dried up but the island was just as she remembered and imagined it. They pulled into the small village of Digg just as the sun was setting.

'Now where?' asked Adam.

'About a quarter of a mile down this road, I think,' said Poppy.

'You've been here before?'

'Yes,' said Poppy inaccurately.

Finally, and bizarrely, the house in her dream came into view. Adam pulled up outside. They both got out and walked up to the front door. Poppy began to tremble.

'You're shaking sweetheart,' said Adam.

She didn't reply. She hesitantly knocked on the strangely familiar door. As before the occupant took a while to answer but finally, the

door opened. A well-dressed old lady stood at the entrance.

‘Hi, I’m Poppy Co… Manning, this is my husband, Adam. We’ve just got married. Your name isn’t Samantha Johnson is it by any chance?’

‘No, but close, my friends call me, Pam. I suppose you want to stay. As it happens, I do have a spare double bed all made up.’

‘No, no, we couldn’t possibly impose on you,’ said Poppy.

‘Get away with you, I’d be honoured. I know who you are. We do have television, even out here you know,’ said the old lady.

It was the perfect honeymoon and the perfect place. Pam was a perfect host and her charges were quite reasonable for bed and breakfast.

Naturally, Adam wanted to consummate their marriage. It had been a long time for him. Unfortunately, Poppy had a headache but she assured him that there would be lots of other times. Adam insisted that it was OK. Being a convincing liar was sometimes a necessary requirement in marriage.

Poppy thought about her dream world. She had indeed been insatiable – ravenous for sex at every opportunity. Adam, on the other hand, had a headache for most of the time, although he always obliged. ‘Interesting how often matters are juxtaposed in reality,’ she thought.

She also had an issue with underwear, this was something she couldn’t immediately explain. Perhaps this was something deep-rooted in her subconscious, right from an early age.

The next morning, they walked to the cliff edge. It was just as Poppy, then Madeline, remembered it: Perfectly peaceful and serene.

‘How did you know about this beautiful place?’ asked Adam.

‘I must have seen it in a documentary or something.’

‘Strange that you went to that particular house?’

‘Just had a feeling there’d be a nice old lady there. You know, a normal dream, you forget, dismiss it almost immediately but when you dream for four months, it stays with you, it won’t go away.’

‘You don’t want it to go away, you mean!’ chided Adam

‘I left another Adam behind. He was you but he wasn’t you. I saw his tears but I turned my back on him. I know it was all in my mind but I feel so remorseful, so guilty. I want to forget but I can’t.’

‘Come on Dorothy, you’ve clicked your heels. Let’s climb down to the beach. I challenge you to a skimming contest!’

‘You’re on! You go down, I’ll follow you in a minute. I just want to take in this view,’ said Poppy softly.

She watched Adam scramble down to the cove and then, moments later, sensed someone standing next to her.

‘Oh, Hi Bops. Isn’t that just the best view you’ve ever seen?’

‘Yes, it is.’

‘I miss you all so much, you know.’

‘We were your healing process and now you are healed. Time to forget about your dream now. You are very much alive and have everything to live for.’

‘Yes, I know.’

‘Keep safe now, and treasure everything you have.’

Until now, Poppy avoided looking too closely at what she thought was just a fading echo of her dream, but now she turned. To her complete shock, it wasn’t Barton at all, but her father as she remembered him. Instantly, tears began to cascade down her cheeks. Nothing more was said. Moments later, his image faded.

‘Decided to join me then?’ said Adam, teasingly.

It was a perfect secluded cove coated with perfect skimming stones.

Eventually, by a pure fluke, Poppy did an eighter. It may have been a tenner but the last two bounces were too small and too quick to be counted. Adam knew he couldn’t beat that so he resorted to playing some *Beach Boy’s* music on his smartphone. They held each other and gently danced on the grey pebbles.

It was a beautiful day.

Something she had thought about before, but there was no harm in thinking about it again: Perhaps one day, in the not too distant future, she would settle down here with Adam and drench herself in happiness.

Five months later Poppy gave birth to a beautiful baby boy. They named him Zol – Zol Manning.

Not THE END

The line between the reality of life and the reality of dreams is blurred as

both are perceived in the deepest reaches of our minds.

Other books by the Author:

The Residents of Wardate

(The first instalment of the Wardate saga)

Poppy Cock is a charismatic News correspondent who suffers horrific burns from a callous incident whilst on an assignment.

Although the autonomous android Madeline Bull is truly groundbreaking, there are insurmountable problems.

The solution; four brilliant scientists decide to interface Poppy Cock's disfigured body using her nerve connections and a revolutionary wireless system to their Madeline Bull android. The price for this convenient arrangement - Poppy must appear to die and then become Mad' Bull and fulfil her intended purpose – to exterminate members of Wardate – a gathering of the world's most evil people.

After completing three missions, her instructions abruptly stop and Poppy's food supply inconveniently dries up. It is an understatement to say that there is much more afoot than she realises…

Ward off strangers

(The third and final part of the Wardate saga)

The saga of The Residents of Wardate concludes with Madeline Bull, the feisty android, returning to a world where people are disappearing in their thousands. This time she has truly met her match and there is only one way out, but first, she has to save the people. The reward for her ultimate sacrifice is hope.

The fruits of Bohemia

Sheridan Banner has a remarkable gift – a gift of perception to rival all who have preceded him. However, his unique abilities are perceived by others as little more than an irritation… until, one day, an abrupt stranger happens to call – the stranger's name is Mark Watson. His father has disappeared along with eighteen other people. Amongst these eighteen people is Sheridan's natural father… who he has never met.

Sheridan is unaware that he holds part of the key to finding them.

Again

Two perfect people, Caban and Keeva, saved from a doomed world, have a very important job to do. 300 million years later absolutely everything rests squarely on their shoulders. It may well involve unimaginable sacrifices and dangers beyond imagination but to refuse the request of an alien, who looks like Caban's father, is simply bad manners. Caban and Keeva incidentally are Adam and Eve.

They say there's an explanation for most things in life… so, just for a while, forget everything you know about everything and open your mind. All you really need to know right now is that a cheeseburger is the most underrated thing in the universe.

Kingdom of Queens

Grandpa has a pressing story to tell his twin granddaughters, but it is real or imaginary? He tells of an ancient Kingdom deep within the Patagonian ice fields, which is completely inaccessible and hidden from the rest of the world. This is as intended as it happens to be the home of all the surviving dragons. The fabled creatures now have only two purposes; to protect the people of the kingdom and keep the climate temperate with their fiery breath. Unfortunately, the survival of the Kingdom and the dragons are now seriously threatened – Grandpa is the only one who can restore the Kingdom to its former glory.

A dragon named Delightful

(Kingdom of Queens)

The Queens, Tegan and Caron, have now settled in as rulers of the magical dragon Kingdom. Everything is perfect for a while, but one day, while the Queens are out for a morning run, an old evilness is disturbed. As a consequence, Queen Tegan becomes spiteful and tiresome with the Kingdom. She instructs Dragon Brathen, against her wishes, to take her home, back to the Netherworld. It is imperative that the rogue Queen and Brathen return, or the Kingdom will perish. There has to be a rescue mission…

The Author…

Third-party again…
As mentioned in his first book, this is actually a picture of the author at his daughter's wedding, some fifteen years ago. I suggested that because of this brazen inaccuracy, the author is vain, has not fully accepted the ageing process and is blatantly deceitful – he got violent!
I also suggested that as he gets older, he seems to be getting grumpier. There really is little that seems to please the man – unless you present him with a plate full of Marmite on toast. He doesn't even like chocolate! That just about sums him up.
They say his style has undertones of Douglas Adams… but it is impossible to pin down whoever 'they' are.